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Letter, Sinclair Lewis to Edwin Lewis [March 28, 1926]

Sinclair Lewis

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La Fonda Hotel

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AT THE END OF THE SANTA FE TRAIL

SANTA FE, NEW MEXICO

Sunday, March 28 (OK) (anyway I think it's the 28th --
at least it's Palm Sunday). [1926]

Dear Dad:

So! I've reached the end of the second stage of my journey -- or no, the third: the first, by train to San Francisco, second, motoring with Simon to Tucson (I think I've written you that I found I hadn't enough work for him to do, so I politely fired him in Tucson), third, motoring with Grace thus far. We hear rumors of mostly mud from here to Kansas City and, both because there is darn little fun motoring day after day through mud and because I'm keen now to get on the job with the new book, we're going to motor only thus far, and I've hired a man to drive the car through to K.C., that being only a little more expensive than sending the car by freight, and much better and quicker. Well, I've driven (and I suppose I've done two-thirds of the driving myself, the rest done by Simon and Grace) some 3200 miles since San Francisco and that will last me for a few months.

Probably Tuesday morning (we haven't yet got our transportation) we'll leave for Kansas City, and Grace will be able to stay there with me for three or four days before she has to get back to New York and to Wells.

by train
after leaving the
wonderfuls.)

We have had a four day jaunt from Phoenix here, The first day everything went beautifully. We left a little before noon and drove about 180 miles to Williams, where we stayed at the beautiful Fray Marcos Harvey Hotel, with a room as luxurious as in any fine New York hotel. The only feature of the day was suddenly coming from a vast level desert prairie to a six mile climb across a mountain range, with the

plain and sudden canyons far below us as we cork-screwed up and up. The next day we hit trouble. Always, when possible, we motor with the top down, but it began to rain like the devil, with a cold wind, and we had to stop beside the road and put up not only the top but the side curtains. We had expected to drive as far as Gallup but it was raining so hard that when at dusk we came to the little Indian trading post at Navajo, and we found that we could get some kind of a room for the night, we put up there. The room was all right -- in a log cabin with log walls and a rusty tin stove, but with good clean beds -- but I can't say so much for the supper: it was composed of cold canned macaroni, cold pork and beans, a cold meat stew, so we made our supper mostly on the fortunately hot tea and peas, with bread and butter.The most interesting thing that day was the sudden change, as we climbed thousands of ~~m~~ feet in altitude, from desert sprinkled with giant ~~cannam~~ cactus to lofty pine forests. ✓

Next day we hit, first, very rough roads, after we had crossed the border into New Mexico; then a fierce snow storm; then about 60 miles of slippery adobe roads, wet from recently melting snow. (Of course we were up at an altitude varying from 5000 to 7000 feet.) So slippery were the roads that we could make only about 15 miles an hour, and even then we were constantly starting to skid. We had hoped to make Alberquerque for the night, but at twilight we were still about 35 miles away. Well, says we, we'll make Los Lunas, anyway, and there's a fair hotel there they say. And we turned on the lights -- only they didn't turn! (Since then, I have found that the trouble was that a certain spring controlling the lights had a little dust on it.) There we were, in a welter of mud, at dark (for the rising moon, however romantic, didn't give enough light to traverse the ruts in muddy roads) and we had been told there was nothing whatever in the way of shelter for at least 25 miles. It looked very much like sleeping in the car beside the road, and it was by now piercing cold. We kept going as long as we could, and came to the lights of another tiny Indian trading post. The Mexican owner admitted that he had cottages for tourists. Our cottage proved to be a tent, with wooden floor, an ancient cook stove, a bed without

mattress or bedclothes, one straight chair, and nothing else whatever. We cajoled the Mexican wife of the owner of the joint into digging up a mattress, some clean sheets, one pillow, and a couple of comforters, and into cooking some eggs for us for supper, and we went to bed at 8:30. Gawd how cold that night was! The comforters just stretched across the bed, no selvage to tuck in, and the cold air (it must have been about freezing) kept sliding in; so that though we went to bed with sweaters and most of our clothes on, we just about kept from freezing all night. In the morning ~~mm~~ the car was covered with frost, and we had one deuce of a time starting it. But we drove on, through Alberquerque, at last leaving the mud ~~mmmmmmmmmmmm~~ which pursued us up to the 16 miles of pavement leaving into that city, and so at last yesterday to Santa Fe -- with no fatalities except a sudden snowstorm with big soft flakes ~~mm~~ falling so fast what even the automatic windshield-cleaner scarcely gave vision to the driver.

AND we enjoyed a good hot bath when we arrived here, and last evening had a cheerful dinner with Arthur Davison Ficke, and in about three days we'll be in Kansas City, and I'll be settled down permanently -- for at least two whole months.

Then I reckon I'll be driving again, toward Sauk Centre!

Love,

h