

## The Desert Between Us

**Phyllis Barber**

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Phyllis Barber's *The Desert Between Us* is a historical love story about the American West and the need for human connections.

Set in the wilds of rural Nevada after the Civil War, the novel focuses on Geoffrey, a road builder tasked with connecting Nevada's scattered forts and silver mines with the lucrative gold mines of California. The goal is to expand the size of the United States; Geoffrey becomes a living embodiment of Manifest Destiny.

Geoffrey's love interest, Sophia, is an English immigrant and a committed Mormon who's involved in a polygamous relationship in a Mormon settlement. Geoffrey tries to take Sophia away from this life, but realizes that the heart is a mysterious organ with its own whims. After all, Sophia wants more than just Geoffrey.

Geoffrey and Sophia are polar opposites, and the book teases out their foibles, hopes, aspirations, and contradictions. Their romance is an anchoring force that, though it doesn't reach a wholly positive conclusion, still involves a deep sense of completeness. Their connection reaffirms that human beings are an integral part of nature.

Most appealing for the scenery it captures, the book devotes paragraphs to the magnificence of the Nevada countryside. It captures big skies and scorching deserts as its characters wage an unwinnable struggle against nature. A subplot related to the real-life introduction of Arabian camels to the American Southwest involves considerable detail about how the plan worked—and didn't. The book's intentional fusion of the culture of the American West with the desert life of the Arabian Peninsula is a point of interest.

In the historical love story *The Desert Between Us*, the most central love is of the Old West.

BENJAMIN WELTON (May / June 2020)

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