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An acre of barren ground

“Take a Highwayman’s Heath.

“Destroy every vestige of life with fire and axe, from the pine tree that has longest been a landmark, to the smallest beetle smothered in smoking moss.

“Burn acres of purple and pink heather, and pare away the young bracken that springs verdant from its ashes.

“Let flame consume the perfumed gorse in all its glory, and not spare the broom, whose more exquisite yellow atones for its lack of fragrance.

“In this common ruin be every lesser flower involved: blue beds of speedwell by the wayfarer’s path—the daintier milkwort, and rougher red rattle—down to the very dodder that clasps the heather, let them perish, and the face of Dame Nature be utterly blackened! Then:

“Shave the heath as bare as the back of your hand, and if you have felled every tree, and left not so much as a tussock of grass or a scarlet toadstool to break the force of the wings; then shall the winds come, from the east and from the west, from the north and from the south, and shall raise on your shaven heath clouds of sand that would not discredit a desert in the heart of Africa.

“By some such recipe the ground was prepared for that Camp of Instruction as Asholt which was, as we have seen, a thorn in the side of at least one of its neighbors. Then a due portion of this sandy oasis in a wilderness of beauty was mapped out into lines, with military precision, and on these were built rows of little wooden huts, which were painted a neat and useful black.”

~From *The Story of a Short Life*, by Juliana Horatia Ewing [#Ewing](#) [#fiction](#) [#description](#) [#landscape](#)

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