The House at Otowi Bridge

Peggy Pond Church

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Recommended Citation
Presented here is the first of two installments of a book-length biography of Edith Warner, who ran a tearoom at Otowi Bridge at the foot of the Pajarito Plateau, before and during the world-shaking changes wrought by the creation of a new city at Los Alamos. Her remarkable personality drew to her the friendship of the Indians of nearby San Ildefonso Pueblo, the scientists of the Manhattan Project, and countless others, like Peggy Pond Church, who were involved in extraordinary happenings here between the years of World War I and the middle of our century.

Peggy Pond Church, well known as a poet, lived at Los Alamos for many years, since her father founded there the Los Alamos Ranch School, and her husband served as its headmaster, until the Government commandeered it. She was born at Watrous, New Mexico, went to high school in Santa Fe, attended boarding schools in California and Connecticut, and was a member of the Class of '26 of Smith College. In 1924 she married Fermor Spencer Church. The Churches are parents of three sons—Theodore, Allen, and Hugh—all of whom work for Sandia Corporation in Albuquerque. She and Mr. Church, who is now retired, but handles occasional electrical engineering jobs, live in Berkeley, California.

Mrs. Church is author of three books of poems: Foretaste (1933), Familiar Journey (1936), and Ultimatum for Man (1946). She has written a juvenile, The Burro of Angelitos (1936). Inevitably, the book printed here is as much an autobiography of Peggy Pond Church as it is a biography of Edith Warner.

Credit and thanks are due to Mrs. Benjamin Ludlow of Bryn Mawr, Pennsylvania, for the use of her sister Edith's manuscripts and letters, to Mrs. Earle Miller for quotations from her letters, and to Dr. J. Robert Oppenheimer for information and permission to quote from Science and the Common Understanding.

The drawings are by Connie Fox Boyd, a painter who lives in Tijeras, New Mexico. Born in Colorado, she has spent most of her life in the Southwest. The rugged landforms of this country often serve as the basis for Mrs. Boyd's sombre-tone abstractions, which for the past five years she has painted in a variety of plastic media. Her schooling has been at the University of Colorado, the University of New Mexico, and at the Art Center School in Los Angeles. She has had six one-man shows, including one currently in the University of New Mexico art gallery. The accompanying sketches were made in the San Ildefonso and Black Mesa region so familiar to Edith Warner.
THE HOUSE
AT
OTOWI BRIDGE

The Story of Edith Warner
by
PEGGY POND CHURCH
I HAVE BEEN sitting in my garden this morning thinking of Edith Warner, how many years it has been since she died and how fast the world we knew has gone on changing. She lies in an Indian grave near the Pueblo of San Ildefonso, nothing over her but the earth hard as a bare heel, and the fragments of the clay pots that were broken over the grave according to the ancient custom of the Pueblos. The little house she lived in beside the bridge was already falling to pieces when I saw it last. The new bridge of towering rigid steel, with two lanes for the traffic that now speeds back and forth to Los Alamos, crosses the Rio Grande close to the wellhouse. The vines that used to hang there, their leaves so glossy and cool in the quivery summer heat, are a mass of clotted dry stems and tendrils. I suppose hardly anyone stops to listen to the river any more.

But I still see Edith standing in the doorway, her thin figure straight as an aspen in a mountain forest, her eyes lifted to the long dark rim of the mesa east of the river. She watches the sky for the northward flight of the wild geese, “that long silver V endlessly circling and reforming,” to tell us of spring’s sure return. The brown buckskin moccasins in which she moved so quietly about her busy days are lapped over at the ankles and fastened in the Navajo style with a silver button—the only concession to Indian costume she ever made. In memory I still see the worn scrubbed boards of the kitchen floor behind her, the old-fashioned range with its twin warming ovens and the woodbox near it that Tilano kept filled with sticks of knotted juniper. The copper kettle simmers on the stove and the house is filled with the warm smell of baking bread.

Old Tilano, who was nearly sixty when he came across the bridge from the pueblo to live with Edith at “the place where the river
makes a noise," comes in from the well and smiles as he sets the bucket of water beside the kitchen door. I shall never forget the gentleness and dignity of his face, brown as a weathered rock, the two black braids of his hair wound with yarn as blue as the sky at midday. I have a picture of him which has stood for a long time on my desk. Dressed in jeans, a sun-faded shirt, a wrinkled cowboy hat, he is stooping to pour clean water over the bare feet of my small son, muddy with play at the edge of the muddy river. The little boy has grown to manhood and has children of his own. Tilano has lived out his life and gone, like Edith, to be part of the timeless spirit of the land.

On the high Pajarito Plateau west of the river, where as a child I used to hunt for arrowheads among the pueblo ruins, the city of Los Alamos now sprawls with its fierce and guarded laboratories, its rows of modern houses, its theaters and flashy supermarkets. The paved road that runs from north to south across the plateau parallels the remnants of an old trail worn ankle-deep in places by the mocassined feet of Indians. On one side of the road is a tightly woven metal fence bearing in enormous red letters the warning DANGER! PELIGROSO! On the other, a "sacred area" has been set aside where the Indians of San Ildefonso still tend traditional shrines and place prayer plumes when their hearts are right.

The Pajarito Plateau opens like a huge fan from an arc of blue mountains in northwestern New Mexico. From a distance it looks almost level, covered with a dark blanket of yellow pine. It is grooved by canyons that radiate from the mountains like the crudely drawn spokes of a wheel. The canyon walls rise through many-colored layers of hardened volcanic ash, pink and rose and buff, like petrified waves. Some of the ridges between the canyons are narrow, rounded like tongues or sleeping lizards. Others are wide and flat, dotted with the mounds of pre-Columbian Indian villages and a few cultivated fields where Spanish-American families used to raise scanty patches of beans in summer, returning in winter to their adobe homes along the Rio Grande.

During the centuries of the Crusades in Europe, the time of the great khans in Asia, through the days when Columbus struggled for ships and money to sail west to the Orient, Indians were living in
settled communities among these canyons and mesas. When the Spaniards came in the sixteenth century they found the villages deserted. The dwellings had fallen into mounds of stone. The sacred kivas were open to the sun and rain. No one knew what had become of the ancient inhabitants. Perhaps drought drove them away. Perhaps they felt their gods had failed them, or that they had failed their gods. Some of the Indians living along the Rio Grande claim them as their ancestors, but no one has been able to make the broken pieces of the puzzle fit together.

A few years ago, returning for a nostalgic visit to scenes of my own childhood, I slept for a night on the ground below Tsirege, one of the largest of the ancient villages. The word means Place of the Bird People. Carried over into Spanish as Pajarito, “little bird,” it became the name by which the whole plateau is known. Long ago, for two magic years, my restless father managed a dude-ranch in Pajarito Canyon, two miles above the now-forbidding fence. When I was a child of twelve I used to ride my barebacked horse to Tsirege and spend hours wondering about the vanished people who had chosen to build their homes in situations of such extraordinary beauty. I remember nothing so still as the silence around that mesa. Eagles soared without sound in the blue above it. Lizards moved in a whisper among the fallen housewalls. Now as I slept and woke and looked up at the turning patterns of the stars, I could hear through the earth the hum of great dynamos that I knew had to do with modern man’s purpose of destruction. I remembered a handful of childish treasures I had hidden at the roots of an old tree in the canyon and knew that I could never go back again to find them.

It was drought that forced us to leave the Pajarito at the end of the second summer. The little stream we used to wade in failed and the spring from which our water had been piped dried up. I remember how we children cried as we drove away, turning for long last looks at the caves where we had played and roasted apples, at our secret hiding places among the cliffs, and the fields where we had chased our stubborn horses.

Almost thirty years later I was exiled from the plateau for the second time when the boys’ school my father founded and in which my husband taught for twenty years was taken over by the Govern-
ment, along with several thousand acres of surrounding plateau and mountain land, for the top-secret project which was working to develop the atomic bomb. The school was called Los Alamos after the deep canyon which bordered the mesa to the south and which was groved with cottonwood trees along the sandy trickle of its stream. It was a name that no one suspected would one day be famous throughout the world.

It was Edith Warner in her little house by the bridge on the road to Los Alamos, who saw it all happen. Through the years of upheaval she and Tilano guarded for us all the changeless essence. In 1943 she began the series of remarkable Christmas letters which kept the land alive for those of us in exile. She wrote us the news of plowing and planting, of the anguish of dust and wind, the blessing of rainfall, pine knots gathered each autumn, the ancient Indian rituals continued even while the sound of experimental blasts from the mesas gave notice that a new and threatening age had come upon us. It brought us a feeling of calm to know she was still there. It was as though we still had a little corner of the Pajarito land we could call our own. She kept watch for us all over the circling seasons and listened for us to the music of the river.

This shy little spinster from Pennsylvania lived for more than twenty years as neighbor to the Indians of San Ildefonso Pueblo, and when she died they buried her among them. Through the Indians she was in touch with a wisdom that has been almost forgotten. The scientists who took our place at Los Alamos became her friends. It was one of the strange aspects of Edith Warner's fate that brought these men and their wives from many nations to gather around her table. Among them were some of the great minds in Europe and America, and their work was to change our world beyond believing. Edith's house became a kind of sanctuary for them in the tense years before Hiroshima. When the new bridge brought the road to Los Alamos so close to the house that life there could no longer be endured, some of the same men whose minds conceived the atomic bomb worked side by side with the Indians to build a new house for Edith and Tilano. When Edith died, Niels Bohr, great physicist, and also, as she tells us, a great man, wrote her sister: "The memory of Edith Warner, a noble personality, and of the
enchanting environment in which she lived, will always be cherished by everyone who met her. Although, in the days of the war it was not possible to speak freely about the hopes and anxieties in one’s mind, I felt that your sister had an intuitive understanding which was a bond between us.”

Many of us hoped that Edith would someday be able to write her story. She made an attempt, but after the first few pages it sounded to her too much like the standard adventure: “White woman moves West. Lives among Indians.” Better nothing than that, she thought, and gave it up. She found herself unable to speak of her deep friendship with her Indian neighbors. I remember what a dislike she had, really the only sharp animosity I ever heard her express, for the anthropologists who kept intruding in the village, prying like irreverent children into the secrets of the kiva. In all her years at the bridge she allowed herself to learn only a few playful words of Tewa because she wanted the village people to keep, even from her, the privacy of their language. She never asked an Indian what his ceremonies “meant” any more than she ever asked me the meaning of the poems I showed her, knowing that the ritual, like the poem, must be its own communication. Besides the unfinished manuscript and the handful of Christmas letters, a few typed pages of her journal are all Edith felt willing to leave behind in writing.

“This is the story of a house,” her manuscript begins, “a house that stood for many years beside a bridge between two worlds.” It stood, too, in the shadow of Los Alamos, the mushrooming shadow of violent change in which all of us now must go on living. More than the story of a house, it is the story of a woman who out of almost nothing made an oasis of serenity and beauty in a world that seemed to grow every day more threatening. Edith Warner died in 1951, her roots still deep and unshaken. The sound of the river was with her to the end.

Because the little house and its rebuilding had meaning for so many, because Edith and Tilano still live as part of my own inner world, I try now to join the broken threads of her story together and weave them with my own.
ONE

MY FATHER, Ashley Pond, grew up in Detroit, a delicate boy who suffered through his school days and even through college with bronchitis. He never forgot the dreary weeks spent in boarding school infirmaries, the choking grey skies, the ominous report cards with their toll of missed classes and failing grades. He was the only surviving son of a brilliant man and carried the burden of his father’s disappointment through his boyhood.

During the Spanish-American War he enlisted with Roosevelt’s Rough Riders, but before he saw active duty a siege of typhoid nearly finished him. His father sent him West to recover his health—a custom which was becoming increasingly prevalent at that time. He lived for months with cattle ranchers on the eastern slope of the Rockies, riding horseback all day long, cooking his meals over campfires, sleeping often under the stars. It was the kind of life, he came to feel, for which men had been made. He began to dream of a school where city boys from wealthy families like his own could regain their heritage of outdoor wisdom at the same time that they were being prepared for college and the responsibilities which their position in life demanded. He was convinced that hours spent on the trail with a knowledgeable cowpony would teach a boy more that he needed to know as a man, than he could ever learn from textbooks.

In the autumn of 1904 his dream was about to be realized. The year before he had met and married a lively girl who came out from St. Louis to spend the summers on her grandfather’s ranch near Watrous in Mora County, New Mexico. A few miles away, in Shoemaker Canyon where the Santa Fe Railroad still runs, he found a site for his school that pleased him. Buildings were ready.
A staff had been engaged. One night, after weeks of unseasonal rains, a railway embankment near the ranch gave way and released tons of flooding water from the swollen Mora River. He had barely time to carry his wife, and the ten-months-old infant who was myself, to a barn on higher ground. Everything he owned was washed away. Adobe buildings dissolved into mud. Navajo rugs were buried in cornfields. An enormous hotel-sized icebox never has been found. It was years before he was financially able to start again.

After a few years back in Detroit, where he entered business, and where my brother and sister were both born—worse luck for them, I always boasted—his father died and left him with an independent income. He returned at once to New Mexico and began years of search for a place to start his school again.

Through an archaeologist friend in Santa Fe he became interested in the Pajarito Plateau. The dude ranch venture in Pajarito Canyon was only intended to be temporary. Soon after it failed he managed to acquire a piece of property on one of the highest mesas to the north. It looked ideal for the school he had never ceased to dream of. A man named Brook had homesteaded the place and put up a few ramshackle buildings near a rain-fed and muddy pool where ducks swam. There were several acres of cultivated fields. The mesa rose high above the barren and broken hills of the Rio Grande Valley, safely above the reach of any flood. The Jemez Mountains were only a mile or two away and the Sangre de Cristos ran the whole length of the eastern horizon into Colorado. A more isolated spot could hardly be imagined, but isolation was an important part of my father’s plan.

A two-story log building was put up, with kitchen and common room and classrooms on the first floor, bedrooms and sleeping porches above. The school opened in 1917. From the beginning it was a self-contained community with its own commissary, electric light-plant and machine shops. Each boy was assigned his own horse to ride. Hay from the fields was stored in a huge barn. Silos for grain were built, corrals and saddlerooms constructed. The duck pond was enlarged and a storage house built beside it to hold the year's supply of ice that was cut each winter. Water was pumped from a stream in a nearby canyon and stored in a big tank that stood
on stilts near the mound of the small ruin in back of the main building.

Soon after the school was established my father withdrew from active participation in its affairs and retired to make his home in Santa Fe. He was a man of vision rather than an educator and had the wisdom to leave it to those more qualified than himself to carry out his dream. To run his school he selected A. J. Connell, who had been active in the Boy Scout movement and who was for many years a ranger in the United States Forest Service. Under Connell’s direction the school grew from a student body of one in its first year to a capacity enrollment of forty-four. In December of 1942 the Government took over the property by process of condemnation for the Manhattan Project, and the history of Los Alamos School abruptly ended. I have always been glad that my father, who died in 1933, did not live to see the day.

In 1924 I married Fermor Church, one of the young men who came out from New England to teach at Los Alamos, and I went there to live, the first faculty wife to join that small and secluded community. I was rather pleased with myself for having outwitted my father who had been so unfeeling as to plan his school for boys and not for girls. I had his own love of horses and mountain trails, and years of Eastern boarding school and college had not cured me.

In those first years I had glamorous ideas of ranch-life. For our honeymoon my husband took me to the mountain cabin where the boys often went on week-end packtrips. It was set among quaking aspens at the head of a steep valley. The birds had the world to themselves, and the call of the towhee was like a string of jewels let down among the dark branches of the fir trees. When the chores were done each day we would saddle up our horses. I had been taught to curry and brush my horse before I was eight, and I proudly placed the striped Navajo blanket on her back just so, the crease at her withers and the two sides even, and swung into place the heavy western saddle that had belonged to my grandfather. The mare would draw in a deep breath while I pulled the front cinch tight. We would tie a canteen to each of the saddles and place a sandwich lunch in the saddlebags. I wore spurs that were not so much to goad my willing mare as to control her, a Stetson hat like
my husband’s, and a pair of leather chaps to protect my knees when our trail led through heavy brush or low-limbed fir trees. We would ride at a walk or a slow trot all day, sometimes to the grassy top of a mountain where a mound of stones marked an old Indian shrine, sometimes to the wide treeless valley that was part of an extinct crater, filled now with flocks of grazing sheep and cattle.

At evening we returned to our cabin to unsaddle the sweaty horses and watch them roll before we turned them loose to graze. I would struggle with the cast-iron Dutch ovens and the task of boiling beans or potatoes at an altitude of nine thousand feet, or take the easy way out and open a can of soup or tomatoes. I learned that to make boiled coffee was a special art. It must be taken from the fire at just the right time and settled with just the right amount of cold water. We drank it from big aluminum cups that burned our lips, but it tasted better than ambrosia.

My husband taught me, as the school boys on their week-end rides were carefully taught, to build a campfire. The best wood was juniper or oak that made long-lasting coals. The aspen and fir in the mountains burned too quickly, but we made it do, letting it roar into its first great blaze and then die down to a mound of sparks before we placed our kettles on it. The mountains would grow dark around us while we ate by the light of a log placed at the back of the fire. Strange crashings of twigs out of the darkness would startle us. The horses whinnied now and then, and we could hear sheep bleating from some herder’s lonely camp.

This was only a taste of the adventure that the boys of Los Alamos were permitted to experience on many of their spring and autumn weekends. They were taught the skills of outdoor living, the care
of themselves and their horses on the trail as thoroughly as the Latin and geometry that their college preparation demanded. When school was in session my husband was seldom able to ride with me. I was never allowed to ride with the boys, so I did my own exploring. There was no trail within seven miles of the school in any direction that I did not know. Even after my first son was born I used to leave him sleeping in his crib while I wandered as far as the time between bottle feedings allowed me.

Mr. Connell looked on my exploits with disapproval. The trouble with me, he said, was that I had not enough to keep me busy—and this judgment I used to deny with considerable temper. He would argue that modern life was spoiling women with its electricity and washing machines and vacuum cleaners. He always declared that the first thing the school had to do for a boy was undo the work of women. I got no credit at all for being resourceful in the woods, or being able to mend a broken tire chain with a strand of wire from some handy fencepost. Why, he wondered inconsistently, couldn’t I sit placidly knitting baby booties like the nurse in her spare time instead of forever fretting my husband to companion me on all-day picnics?

For a long time the nurse at the school was my only woman companion, and she had her own routine that kept her busy. The thirty-five mile drive to Santa Fe used to take more than three hours and we had to cross arroyos often treacherous with sand or angry with flashing water. There was only a narrow railway trestle over the Rio Grande at the place we called Otowi, and we drove across straddling the rails on the open ties with the earth-colored water coiling underneath as muscular as a snake. I remember the first Christmas when we were planning to spend the day with my parents in Santa Fe, we woke to find the world covered with three feet of snow, and had to inch our way down the steep switchback road behind a snowplow.

Needless to say, we left the mesa very seldom. Our nearest neighbors were the Smithwicks, who looked after a mentally retarded boy, at Anchor Ranch five miles to the south. When I grew hungry for female gossip I would put sandwiches in my saddlebags and ride over to spend the day with Connie Smithwick.
It was there on an autumn afternoon in 1925 that I first met Edith Warner. I remember her then as a shy and diffident person who wandered into the rustic sitting room while Connie and I were having tea. Where had this prim little figure come from, I wondered? She was wearing a blouse and skirt that looked as though they might have come out of a missionary barrel. I was not surprised when Connie told me later that “Miss Warner” had grown up as the eldest of five daughters in a Baptist minister's household in Pennsylvania. Toward the end of 1921 she suffered some kind of breakdown, and a wise diagnostician, finding no physical cause for her persistent illness, prescribed a year of outdoor life without responsibilities. Almost at random she had chosen to spend that year of freedom in New Mexico. A friend of hers had been there and recommended a small guest ranch in Frijoles Canyon west of Santa Fe. At the end of her year Edith Warner had fallen in love with the country and decided she could live happily no place else. Since then, in spite of her delicate health, she had been trying one expedition after another to earn a living so she would not have to return to the clouded and crowded atmosphere of Pennsylvania. The Smithwicks who had met Edith during her first year in New Mexico, had taken a liking to her and asked her to live with them awhile as a kind of governess to the young boy in their care.

Miss Warner took almost no part in the conversation that afternoon except to show a city-dweller's sentimental enthusiasm for wildflowers. She was narrow-shouldered and the bones in her face showed too plainly. Her eyes were guarded by wide-rimmed glasses and she wore her hair coiled limply as though she had long ago given up the effort to be pretty. It seemed to me that no one could belong less to this land of burning skies and mountains. What was there about this landscape that attracted her, I wondered? I had the born Westerner's easy scorn for the tenderfoot and was sure this one would not last long.

How astonished I was to learn some three years later that Mr. Connell had given Miss Warner the job of looking after the freight at the little boxcar railway station beside the bridge at Otowi, and that, of all things, she was planning to open a teahouse.
EDITH WARNER was thirty years old when she left Pennsylvania in the fall of 1922. This was almost exactly the midpoint of her life. All of her future lay folded still within her, like the Mariposa lilies she came to love—those three-petaled white blossoms with the golden centers whose seed must often wait patiently through years of drought for enough moisture to make them germinate.

She had always been a serious child, her sister tells me, and until she was seven years old, the only one. Her first years were spent almost entirely with adults, of whom a grandfather had been especially close. On her mother’s side she was German, on her father’s English, Scotch and Welsh. Her father already had a young family when he gave up a career in business to enter the ministry. This sudden change of vocation took real courage. Because of his shyness, he found preaching difficult. Only stubborn determination, much like Edith herself showed later, and a deep religious conviction enabled him to persist in it. Her mother was a dynamic woman in whom gentleness and humility were blended with tremendous pride and strength of will. She had a gift for understanding people that was almost psychic. The German-Lutheran grandmother was a diminutive lady whose God was indeed a mighty fortress. She mixed her Biblical quotations with a sparkling sense of humor.

With such a background it was inevitable that the eldest daughter should grow up with a strong sense of duty. Edith was ten years old at the time her father entered the ministry and a large share of the responsibility for helping with the busy household fell on her shoulders. She became self-supporting as early as she could, as much to help with the financial burden as for her own sake. She was eighteen when she graduated from Normal school and began to
teach. She started out in a one-room country school where she handled all the subjects. Later she taught English in a high school in Philadelphia. She found this work desperately uncongenial. Looking back in the second year of her life beside the Rio Grande, she writes in her journal:

"I have been lying here looking out at the mesa and the aspen all golden on the Sangres, and I know that no wooded, verdant country could make me feel as this one does. Its very nudity makes it intimate. There are only shadows to cover its bareness, and the snow that lies white in the spring. I think I could not bear again great masses of growing things: . . . It would stifle me as buildings do.

She worked for a while as industrial secretary for the Y. W. C. A. in Easton, Pennsylvania. This suited her a good deal better. It involved a lot of outdoor life, camping and picnicking with young working girls, which she enjoyed. In spite of her shyness she showed, like her mother, a real talent for working with people. She fell in love now and again during these years but none of the affairs materialized. Underneath her conscious duty-fulfilling will something was struggling to break forth into another kind of life. Perhaps her spirit belonged to the gods from the beginning as the eagles belong to the sky—the eagles in whose presence she says she could never feel anything but deep awe. Like a captive bird she was torn by the instinct to seek her freedom, though her mind was for a long time unaware of what she fought for. It was not long after the end of the First World War that her body, unable to stand the strain, rebelled.

"Perhaps the war and post-war years had been too strenuous," she said, "Perhaps unknown forces were changing the pattern of my life."

Afterwards it seemed important to her that everything happened almost without her own volition. It was the merest chance that she decided to go to New Mexico. She knew nothing about it. It was little more to her than a name in geography. The solitude and peace of the guest ranch in Frijoles Canyon sounded like heaven when her friend described it. She made ready, as though in a dream, for the long journey.
On an autumn evening in 1922, Edith Warner found herself on the station platform at Lamy waiting for the local train that would take her the eighteen remaining miles to Santa Fe. Darkness hid New Mexico. All around were the dark shapes of hills, their outlines sharp as knives against the bright black night. The stars seemed unbelievably close and brilliant. The crisp air was like nothing she had ever breathed. She began to feel that she had entered another world.

From Santa Fe the next morning she was driven forty miles to Frijoles. Mountains rimmed the world. The sky was as blue as though made of crystal. To the east the Sangre de Cristo Mountains shone with what seemed masses of molten metal far up their sides. Westward, patches of aspen splashed the same color along dark green slopes. The sand of the dry riverbeds shone golden. Rabbit brush, with its borrowed and beautiful Spanish name, “chamisa,” bore lemon yellow blossoms above the golden green of its foliage.

The driver of the battered-looking automobile was John Boyd, who with his wife, Martha, was running the Frijoles guest ranch that year. He was a lanky Hoosier with picturesque mustaches and a pipe which he kept forever lighting. His sense of humor and his incomparable gift for storytelling had endeared him to the Indians who lived along the Rio Grande. They would laugh when he teased them, and share their stories with him.

“Had I not come in that year of 1922 while the Boyds were at Frijoles,” Edith tells us, “someone else might have lived in the house at Otowi bridge. Had they not taken me into their hearts I might never have known the people of San Ildefonso. Without Father Boyd’s tutelage there could have been no background of understanding. It was he who taught me to watch for tracks on the trail, showed me the significance a stone might have.”

On this first day, his conversation flowed over Edith like a wind. She found the breadth of landscape almost overwhelming. For miles stony hillsides alternated with sandy washes. In places the road seemed scarcely more than two faint tracks. Elsewhere the two tracks were deep ruts which had to be straddled gingerly as though the car were crossing a tightrope. After many miles the road suddenly steepened and dropped downward toward a river that split...
the bare landscape like a copper wire. This, John Boyd told Edith, was the Rio Grande. The river emerges at this point from behind the bulk of an iron-colored mesa, flattens out below the light, bright hills, then narrows and disappears again into a dark gorge. Westward beyond the river rises a fortress-like plateau, wall upon serrated wall of many-colored rock. The river guards its base like an ancient moat. I myself can never drive toward the Pajarito mesas without feeling what I did as a little girl, that I am about to enter a legendary land.

The road in those days crossed the river several miles south of Otowi over a battered and shaky wooden bridge at a railway siding called Buckman. It almost disappeared in a waste of sand, then suddenly turned and flung itself upward across the sloping surface of the plateau wall, upward and up while the river narrowed to a shimmering thread bordered by purple rocks and thin webs of green. Edith Warner could see again the Sangre de Cristos rising blue out of a basin of rosy hills. It seemed as though the sky were both above her and below.

After reaching the top of the plateau, the road twined for a while among almost level mesas and low broken cliffs. It zigzagged south across a series of steep canyons whose walls rose steplike in masses of gray and rose. The plateau was formed, John Boyd explained, of volcanic ash that had accumulated over a long period of time, not in one explosion, but many. Part of the stuff that fell was like fine sand, small particles of incandescent rock mixed with great quantities of steam. It billowed from the westward mountains in the form of a burning cloud. When the fury of explosion spent itself, what fell was mud, soft as a porridge that lay almost as level as a lake upon the surface of the existing landscape. Cooling, it hardened, layer upon layer, like an enormous mudpie left to bake in the sun. Over the centuries rivulets of water draining snow and rain from the mountains carved wider channels. Wind and rain pockmarked the canyon walls. Birds and animals found shelter in the cavities. On the trail of the animals came man, whose hands shaped the yielding rock according to his need.

Edith Warner must have felt herself growing almost numb with new impressions. Out of masses of juniper and piñon the road
emerged at last into a forest of tall western pine. The ground was matted with aromatic needles. Grama grass shone feathery in the afternoon sunlight. At the edge of a canyon the road abruptly ended. From here, John Boyd told her, all supplies for the ranch must be sent down by pack horse or slid in a basket on a long wire pulley. The guests had to walk more than a quarter of a mile down a dusty trail into the canyon. Worn out as she was, Edith Warner wondered if she would ever climb back up, if she would ever return to the familiar world she had left behind.

A sudden turn in the trail disclosed a crescent-shaped canyon, and far below, a narrow stream lined with alders as bright as the sunlight. On the other side of the Rito de los Frijoles—the little river of the beans—she saw the stone ranch house and guest cabins where her new life was to begin. That night she slept in the greatest quietness she had ever known.

For a long while she had strength to do little but rest. Then each day she found herself walking a little farther, climbing the mesa trails a little higher. At the top she would find a place where she could sleep for hours in the shelter of a sun-warmed rock. She waked feeling as though the strength of earth and sky had filled her. In later years this was to be one of her chief sources of renewal.

Edith tells in the beginning of her manuscript how surprised she was to learn that Frijoles Canyon had once been the home of a prehistoric people. The great ruin near the bottom of the old trail was called Tyúonyi. The School of American Research had conducted excavations there in 1908-09, and its walls now lay open and roofless like a fragment of honeycomb.

On the south-facing side of the canyon a steep talus led up to a sheer cliff. At the base of the cliff and high in the cliff wall were the symmetrical openings of hollowed caves. The ceilings were still blackened with the smoke of long-ago fires. Etched into them were drawings—lively as children’s—of animals, birds, masked beings, dancing men, symbols of rain and sun.

High in the wall of a cliff a mile above Tyúonyi there was an arched ledge of rock with a kiva in its floor, a hidden place of ceremony where men of old time rehearsed the mystery of their emergence into life and invoked the guardian spirits of their clan. The
stream rippled beneath it through thickets of alder and willow. Trout flickered in the water. At twilight deer came down among the pines to drink.

It was hard to believe that five hundred years had passed since the people of Tyúonyi had laid down their tools and gone their unknown way. Their presence seemed as real to Edith as the sunlight on her skin. A woman might have been grinding only yesterday at this hollowed metate. A stone axe seemed warm from the grip of a man’s hand. Wherever she walked fragments of boldly decorated pottery spoke of this ancient people’s love of beauty. The earth seemed alive with the human essence of those who had danced their prayers upon it.

From John Boyd she learned to know the names of the cities that lay in grassy mounds of stone on the high mesas: Tsirege, Sankewi’i, Navawi’i, to the north Puyé and Shupinna. At Navawi’i where the mesa narrows, he showed her a deep pit hollowed in the rock where deer were once driven to their death by ancient hunters. Here she learned that Indians do not kill for pride or triumph as white men do, nor even heedlessly for their own need of food. They believe that man and deer both serve the purposes of life, that the deer will willingly let itself be slain if invoked with proper ceremony, if the will of the hunters is good, if their hearts are right.

On a perpendicular wall of rock at Tsirege she saw the Plumed Serpent marking the place where the trail goes up from the canyon bottom—a form of divinity associated by Indians with lakes and springs, with rain and running water. From the mounds of Sankewi’i, John Boyd pointed out in each direction a sacred mountain. On the tops of these mountains and in many high places of the plateau were shrines where the prayers of men were still planted in the shape of little feathered wands, feathers to carry the needs of the people aloft to the powers which control the movements of clouds and of animals.

During these months in the canyon, Edith Warner came to feel that there are certain places in the earth where the great powers that move between earth and sky are much closer and more available than others, and that this region, this arid stretch of valley, plateau and circling mountain, was one of them. Was it the nature of the
land itself, she wondered, some quality of rock, some effect of light or cloud or shaped horizon? Or was it because here the old and natural relationship and interdependence between man and the earth has for so long been kept fresh and new by the Indians?

The Pueblos have always believed that the earth they live upon is sacred. Each stone and bush and tree is alive with a spirit like their own. The gods lean from the clouds. They walk the earth in the shape of rain and of rainbows. When a man dies his spirit joins those of the Ancestors and comes with the clouds to rain upon the earth and make it fertile. It is the duty of all living men to maintain the harmony they are aware of in the world around them. They live in community not only with one another but with earth and sky, with plants and animals. They believe that the orderly functioning of the universe depends on them.

“Those first four months at Frijoles brought me the first conscious awareness of many things,” said Edith. It was as though her groping spirit were putting forth roots, small tendrils of receptivity to the great forces of earth and sky that surged around her. She began to feel everywhere the persistence of a spirit that is more than mortal.

“My friend was wrong,” she wrote some years later in her journal, “who said that this country was so old it does not matter what we Anglos do here. What we do anywhere matters but especially here. It matters very much. Mesas and mountains, rivers and trees, winds and rains are as sensitive to the actions and thought of humans as we are to their forces. They take into themselves what we give off and give it out again.”

What the former inhabitants of the plateau had given off was now part of the essence of this land. She was beginning to learn what it means to live at the center of a sacred world.
THREE

ONE CRISP afternoon in late December, John Boyd asked Edith Warner to go with him on a trip to San Ildefonso, where he wanted to make arrangements for his guests to stay at the time of the pueblo's winter feast. They drove down from the plateau in the old topless Ford, its back seat loaded with Christmas candy for the children. They crossed the river over the old bridge at Buckman—the rickety structure I remember from childhood, which has long since been demolished. The road turned north from Buckman and wound upward along the east side of the lava-crowned mesa that the Indians call Shumo. At the top of a little rise the hill sloped downward into a world of brilliant light and shadow.

San Ildefonso lies in the Rio Grande Valley at the broad mouth of the Rio Nambé whose water, born in the Sangre de Cristo Range some twenty miles east, now scarcely ever reaches the great river. Irrigation ditches lead most of it off for alfalfa fields and orchards all up and down the valley. What little is left buries itself in the sand and feeds the roots of cottonwood trees that in autumn shine like a river of living gold. The rounded hills that guard the pueblo to the east are dotted with ovals of piñon and juniper. Beyond them the flesh-colored sediments have been sharply eroded into abstract planes and angles. The vegetation is sparse and inconspicuous. Only the sky above the mountains blossoms, in summer with white clouds that unfurl in gigantic flower forms, in winter with aurora-colored tides of sunset.

The Black Mesa stands square and solid at the margin of the river. A plum-colored ooze of hardened lava, it has been stripped of the sediments which once encased it and bears upon its flat summit a remnant of the former valley floor—marking the depth in time
through which the Rio Grande has carved its present channel. Indian mothers still discipline their children with tales of a giant who lives there in a deep cave and who will fetch them away if they are naughty.

The village has moved many times in its remembered past. It has been at its present location since the sixteenth century. The Spaniards, coming up from Mexico with their dream of golden cities, found mud-colored houses clustered around bare plazas just as they do today. In the south plaza the round kiva stands massive and silent except on feast days. Its ladder slants upward toward the sky; wide adobe steps lead outward and down to the ground smoothed by centuries of dancing feet. In the north plaza a cottonwood tree has widened its shadow through innumerable seasons.

In December the tree was leafless. Under the shelter of its grey-white branches children were playing who, as soon as they saw the tall “Anglo” ran to greet him like a favorite friend. They did not seem surprised to find his pockets full of candy, and soon all the round brown faces were bulging like chipmunks. They giggled and talked among themselves in whispers, small boys with enormous black eyes under their close-cropped hair, small girls with straight bangs hoisting children almost as big as themselves in competent brown arms.

The children stared at Edith like a flock of fledgling robins, not quite sure whether to be bold or shy. Merriment spilled out of their
dark eyes, and she imagined how Frijoles Canyon once echoed with
the laughter of children like these. How alike young things are in
every time and place, she thought. And what a happy place to play
this seemed—the hard-swept plaza, the rows of low houses fronting
on it, some of the crooked door frames painted blue, some white,
some natural weathered wood, the round shapes of adobe ovens like
the kennels of friendly animals, the wagons and farming tools in
the shelter of the great bare tree.

When the last bit of candy was devoured and the children had
run off to their games or to relate the afternoon’s adventure to their
mothers, John Boyd took Edith with him to the house of his friend,
Ignacio Aguilar. There was nothing special about Ignacio to mark
that he was the religious leader of the pueblo. He was a little man
with eyes that seemed to her both shrewd and kind. His iron-grey
hair was drawn up and tied in a knot at his neck; bangs and long
side-locks framed his wrinkled face. He was dressed as a farming
man anywhere might be, in jeans and a sun-faded cotton shirt. The
dignity with which he greeted his visitors was that of a man to whom
courtesy comes as naturally as breathing.

“My house is yours,” he said as he welcomed them in out of the
chill of the winter afternoon. The room into which they stepped
seemed spacious and uncluttered. The walls were white and
smooth; the ceiling was upheld by long pine beams. There was
little furniture. A few straight chairs and a couple of homemade
stools stood near the corner fireplace. A long blanket-roll against
one wall served as a seat by day and spread out to make a bed at
night. On a pole suspended from the vigas were arranged the fam­
ily’s ceremonial garments—striped blankets and buckskin leggings.
Holy pictures and a rosary hung on the wall. A couple of upright
sticks of piñon gave an astonishing amount of heat and a sweet
fragrance like the essence of summer days.

Edith sat quietly by the fireplace while the two men talked to­
gether. On the way down from the plateau John Boyd had told her
a little about Ignacio. She knew the gnarled hands that rested on
his knees had scattered wheat for many plantings and heaped the
corn for many huskings, that they could tan a deerskin so that it was
soft and white for moccasins. All the trails as well as the plants of
mountain and mesa were known to him. He had been trained in the ritual of the Mass and served the Mission priest throughout his life. In addition there had been handed down to him by word of mouth the vast and ancient knowledge essential for the position he held in the pueblo. It was his responsibility to watch over the pattern of daily life in his village, the detail of ceremonial observance whereby man is made conscious of the part he plays among the seasons and the elements. Above everything he must keep himself free from disturbing thoughts. He must pray and fast often. Over and over he must remind his people that the good of the village depends upon the strength and energy with which each man in his heart wills what is good.

Susana, Ignacio's wife, could speak no word of English but she managed to express her friendliness in other ways. Ignacio's son, Joe, had married a girl from Picuris, one of the northern pueblos. Rosalie had learned to speak Tewa, the language of San Ildefonso, and fitted into the family and village life as though she had been born there. Her mother-in-law had taught her to make the pottery for which the San Ildefonso women are famous. On a ledge near the fireplace stood a row of polished bowls, and, with her shy smile, Susana placed one in Edith's hands. Around its margin, etched in dull black on glossy black, she marveled to see the outline of the Plumed Serpent—the same figure John Boyd had shown her drawn on the rock at Tsirege. The design was conventionalized, almost as abstract as a Greek border except for the head with its backward-pointing plume and the zigzag lightning issuing from its mouth. A motif of terraced cloud was repeated in each undulation of the body. Edith found herself thinking of the winding thrust of the river, of the stab of lightning in the dark folded clouds, of dry earth pounded by long lines of rain. The Plumed Serpent, she began to realize, was no literal reptile, but one of the most ancient metaphors of human thought. Not the river, but the force embodied in the river; not the cloud but the life-giving energies within the cloud—these are what the image of the Plumed Serpent speaks of to the Pueblo people and to all who know that rain is one of the many forms of deity.
From the first, Edith knew enough never to question an Indian about his mysteries. What she learned through the years she learned as silently as she did from stones or trees, from rivers and mesas, as she now did from the feel under her fingers of this bowl that a woman's brown hands had finished in beauty, out of a wisdom older than any word.

It was several months later that Ignacio told her the story of the Plumed Serpent, Awanyu. She had grown by then to love the San Ildefonso people, and the Aguilar family made her welcome whenever she came there. One summer day she had ridden horseback to the pueblo. It had been a long journey from the mountains, across the sun-drenched mesas, down the narrow trail among the fallen black boulders, and across the river. In the cool of the evening Ignacio placed chairs outside the doorway. Relaxing after the long day's ride, she rested her head against the adobe wall of the house. She watched the afterglow touch the kiva, the curved mesas across the river, the long mesa to the south, Shumo. The evening star shone out above the rim of the western mesa. Under the great cottonwood tree in the north plaza the pueblo boys were singing an age-old song. Edith felt at home, as if she had come again to some familiar moment of childhood—a childhood that belongs to us all, though farther away and longer ago than our memories.

It was a moment that was ripe for stories, the old tales men sometimes tell their children in the half-light. Ignacio had been smoking a cigarette, not nervously, she noticed, as most white people do, but slowly, tranquilly, as though the inhaling of each breath were a sacred gesture. When the last blue feather of smoke had vanished he began to speak in a voice that was as brittle as the rustle of dry leaves.

"Now I tell you about Awanyu," he began. His face was almost invisible in the darkness, yet she could feel his eyes on hers intent as a watchful bird. His words were simple as though he were speaking to a child.

"He lives many miles away in a deep lake. Sometimes he does not come for many months. We plant corn and wheat but the ground is hard. They come up. They grow a little, but if no rain
comes, they die. We have no atole, no bread for winter.” His old voice trembled as though he were remembering centuries of hunger. “Then we pray and dance,” he went on strongly, “all the men and women and children. We dance all day and all night. And when we dance, if our hearts are right, he comes. No matter if the ice be that thick”—and Ignacio held his hand several feet above the ground, “he breaks through and comes in the black cloud!” Edith felt he did not merely believe this story as legend. It was something he knew as surely as men know that each day the sun rises.

“If, when we dance, our hearts are right, the rain will come.”

“If our hearts are right . . .” These words stirred something deep in Edith Warner. She began to realize that the Pueblo dances are not simply magical devices to control the forces of nature. They are a means by which men bring their own lives into harmony with the order and beauty of the world around them.

“In the beautiful still world,” Edith says in her narrative, “I kept pondering Ignacio’s words.” She was still pondering them on that August day nearly twenty-five years later when the report of the atomic bomb flashed round the world from devastated Hiroshima, the bomb that had been made at Los Alamos, only twenty-five miles from San Ildefonso where the Indians still dance in summer to help the green corn grow.
"I am not, and never have been, the guiding hand in my life," Edith writes in the first of her Christmas letters. "Something—what, I do not venture to say—has prevented what I thought I wanted to do and pushed me into what I eventually did."

In the spring of her first year in New Mexico the Boyds gave up the guest ranch in Frijoles and moved to an unsettled valley high in the Jemez Mountains. Restless adventurer that he was, John Boyd could never contentedly stay long in one place. His wife thought wistfully of the comfortable farm life in Indiana where they had lived in the first years of their marriage. She was a friendly woman who found the greatest delight in church socials and busy neighboring, but she adored her husband and followed him from one lonely place in New Mexico to another throughout his life. It was Martha Boyd who taught Edith Warner what women who must cope with daily living on the edge of a wilderness need to know. During her four months at Frijoles the Boyds became to her like second parents, and when they left the canyon they took her with them.

The last lap of the two-day journey was made in a wagon. For a while they slept in tents at the edge of a little clearing surrounded by fir and aspen. Then they built a log cabin with a corral beside it. Water had to be carried in buckets across a narrow footbridge from a spring on the opposite side of the ice-cold stream. The women wrestled with an old cookstove and an uncertain supply of wood that burned stubbornly. Long-range planning and ingenuity were required to feed the hungry men who worked all day cutting and hauling logs for the new buildings and laying them in place. Food was shipped from Santa Fe to the old siding at Buckman by freight,
and hauled from there by wagon up the long hill, along the mesa, then over the mountainside into the Valle Grande where only faint wagon tracks showed through the grass. Fresh vegetables and fruit were rare luxuries. A high point of that summer was a basket of apricots brought in by wagon from Jemez Springs many rough miles to the south. The mail came once a week. It was often Edith who rode horseback for it, over the lonely trail past Vallecitos de los Indios, down the steep red-rocked canyon, past the old ruin of a Spanish mission to the little village of Jemez Springs—and back again. The trip took nearly a whole day.

Edith told me how she used to think, during these long rides, of the dreary mornings when she stood shivering on a street corner in Philadelphia, waiting for a bus to take her to the school where she was teaching, wondering how she could live through another day of it. This spring in the Valle she watched the first shimmer of green on the white aspens. Each day the color spread and became a little denser but never matched the darkness of the evergreens. White violets began to bloom along the stream. Later there were wild strawberries along the sunny slopes. In the Valle Grande, lambs on wobbly legs filled the air with their bleating. The winds had blown bitterly at first, but Martha Boyd comforted Edith on days when her nerves began to fray, saying, "The wind will go down with the sun."

The life was hard, and she found herself longing for the desert landscape with its magic lights and colors, the Rio Grande gleaming like a great bronze snake in the waste of black rocks tumbled from the mesa. She knew that her year of freedom in New Mexico was almost over, and yet, if she could, she must find a way to stay.

Edith's family, who loved her and never ceased to admire her spirit and her courage, were willing to help her to the limit of their ability—yet she never got over the feeling that it was she who should have been helping them. When she left the Boyds in the fall of 1923 her sister Vel, now Mrs. Benjamin Ludlow, came out to Albuquerque and got a job so that Edith would not have to return East for another year. This was the beginning of a very close relationship between the sisters, and until she married, Vel returned to visit Edith at Otowi almost every summer.
Nothing but sheer determination kept Edith going through the four years that followed. After the tutoring job with the Smithwicks she returned East for a few years but suffered from such ill health that she was forced to go back to the Southwest. For a time she was a patient at the Tilden Health School in Denver, and later on its staff. In 1928 she returned to New Mexico and the discouraging task of hunting an occupation. Her ideas of how to make a living in that sparsely settled country were numerous, she says, but impractical for an unmarried woman of thirty-five with no financial resources. The most impractical of these ideas did not compare with the job that Fate, half-smiling, half-severe, seems to have had in mind for Edith Warner from the very beginning.
THREE miles from San Ildefonso Pueblo across the bridge on the road to Los Alamos was a shabby little house that Edith Warner had always thought looked particularly out-of-place in New Mexico where for centuries flat-roofed adobe houses had been built to blend with the earth from which their sunbaked bricks were made. The land it stood on belonged to an Indian family at the pueblo, but none of them would have dreamed of living there. They might have tried to grow a field of corn or beans, but the ground was too high above the river for irrigation. Long ago one of the Indians had planted a small orchard near the edge of the sandy arroyo that enters the river from the west. He would walk over each day in summer to tend it, but at night he always returned to the comfortable companionship of his wife and small children who greeted him with cries of “Tay-tay”—Grandfather—as they ran out to take his hand and lead him into supper.

The little house stood beside a dingy boxcar railway station not far from the tracks of the Denver & Rio Grande narrow-gauge railroad that until late in 1941 ran between Santa Fe and Antonito, Colorado. In the early twenties a one-lane suspension bridge was built beside the old railway trestle, the old crossing at Buckman was abandoned, and Otowi became the unloading point for all mail and supplies that were shipped to Los Alamos School from Santa Fe. A truck was sent down to take them the rest of the way, but it made the trip up the steep switchback road only three times weekly. In between times, someone living at the station had to see to unloading the freight and keep watch against possible marauders.

At first the caretaker had been a Portuguese Basque named Shorty, who used to work at a logging camp situated on the south
side of the road. Two rooms of the little house had been part of the camp, and when logging operations ceased Shorty acquired the house for his own use. He rented an acre of land from a San Ildefonso family and then proceeded to move the house across the tracks. After adding a room and digging a well, Shorty opened a store which offered the few passersby soft drinks, tobacco and canned food. During Prohibition he augmented his tiny income by selling bootleg whiskey. One day the law must have come sniffing a bit too close on Shorty's trail for comfort, for he suddenly vanished, leaving no one now who even remembers his proper name.

When Shorty left, Adam, a young San Ildefonso Indian, consented for a while to act as watchman. His father and mother, Julián and María Martínez—the famous potters—bought the house, since it stood on their land; and Adam, after adding a fourth room, took his wife to live there. They found it lonely, in spite of the two toylike trains that ran by each day, and soon returned to the deeply rooted communal life of their pueblo. This left the little house unoccupied, the freight unguarded.

On the day that Edith Warner had exhausted the last known possibility for earning a living in Santa Fe, she met Mr. Connell, the director of Los Alamos School, at a hotel in Santa Fe. At his wits' end, looking for someone—by that time anyone—to stay at Otowi, he offered her the job.

He knew almost nothing about her. He only knew that she wanted desperately to remain in the country. He was a man of determined character who usually managed to obtain any objective he set his mind to, and he had a strong Irish streak which persuaded him to deal with people on the basis of his hunches.

He did his best, in his smooth Irish way, to make the job sound glamorous. "You can rent the house for very little," he told her. "María and Julián own it. Their son, Adam, will come over to unload the freight for you. All you have to do is see that he gets there on time. We will pay you twenty-five dollars a month." He sounded as though it were a princely sum. At least it would be better than nothing, she told herself. With her long experience in frugal living she might make it do.

"That will cover the rent and Adam's wages," Mr. Connell con-
continued. Edith’s heart sank. How did he expect her to live, she wondered? Did he think the birds would feed her? “Of course the profits of the store will all be yours,” he had added quickly. “And with you living there, no one will attempt theft.”

Surely his desperation had addled his wits a little, she thought. Frail and reticent as she had always been, how could anyone possibly take her for a watchdog? At the bridge she would be entirely alone except for the few passersby, Indians, shepherders, an occasional tourist, no other human being within shouting distance, not even a telephone except the railway instrument which was unavailable for private use. Her only link with the world would be the truck from the school, and the trains that often whistled past without stopping. Her nearest neighbors would be the Indians at the pueblo, a long walk on the other side of the river.

The whole plan seemed completely fantastic. Surely there could be no one as little suited for such a job. Yet to wait for another opportunity would be too great a gamble. The meager resources with which her family had been helping through her illness had been exhausted. A decision had to be made at once. Return East she would not, of that much she was certain. This offer would tide her over for a little, would give her time to look for a better solution.

“How soon can you take over?” the determined voice was asking.

“I can start any time,” she heard herself say, amazed, as though she listened to some stranger.
SPRING was late again in 1928. On the first day of May at Otowi not one shiny green leaf brightened the gray branches of the cottonwoods in the bend of the river. The wind had been blowing for days and the sky was leaden with dust. Sand whirled along the margins of the river.

When she stepped across the splintered threshold of the little house, Edith wondered what madness had possessed her. The boards in the floor were cracked. Knotholes had been patched with pieces of tin. The ceilings were made of sagging and faded wallboard. In one room there was no ceiling at all, only the weather-stained boards that formed the low-peaked roof. The dingy windows let in hardly enough light to see by. There were no cupboards or closets of any kind. It seemed impossible to hope that the untidy little shack could ever be made into a place of peace and beauty.

It had been one of Edith's wild dreams, in the weeks since Mr. Connell had persuaded her to live there, that in addition to selling gasoline and cokes she might run the place as a tearoom. She could serve fresh bread and homemade cookies to the groups of boys who occasionally came down from the school to swim in a protected arm of the river. She had a special recipe for chocolate cake. Santa Fe was already a tourist center and visitors on their way to Frijoles were crossing the bridge at Otowi in increasing numbers. She might be able to fix up a room for occasional paying guests, women like herself who needed a few weeks of solitude to restore bodies and spirits frayed by the confusion of city living. Today Edith only found herself wondering how long she could manage to survive.

Fortunately there was work to be done. In the room that had been the store her few belongings waited to be unpacked. These con-
sisted of a couple of trunks, some boxes of books, a barrel of dishes, two folding beds and four straight chairs. Her mother, she knew, would have told her there was no time to be wasted in discouragement. She found herself thinking of her little German grandmother who as a bereaved and timid young girl had packed her thick Lutheran books in a wooden chest and set sail for a new life in America. It seemed as though the spirits of all women, who since humanity’s beginning have made homes in wilderness, came now to companion her like an invisible chorus. Perhaps the trouble with the little house, she thought, was that only rootless men had used it for a shelter. No woman had ever tried to fill it with human warmth and make it beautiful. At least she must try to overcome her own feeling of dismay and establish some pattern for temporary living.

Woman-like, she started at once on the middle room which was to be the kitchen. By evening she had succeeded in making that one room habitable. A Navajo rug on the floor worked a magic of symmetry and color. Empty packing boxes became a table and cupboard. A soft-colored Chimayo blanket turned one of the narrow beds into a couch. A ticking clock, a pot of ivy on a high sill, a teakettle singing on the range—it was as though the heart of the little house had begun to beat.

Edith kept herself so busy all day that she was hardly conscious of the world outside the house. The afternoon train whistled shrilly for the crossing and rattled south without stopping. Now and then she heard a car pass over the bridge. The wind that had battered against the walls all day died at evening, and everything became still. After supper she went to sit on the steps outside the kitchen door. The only sound was made by the rushing Rio Grande, swollen by melting snow.

The Rio Grande at Otowi is a tawny color, heavy with sand and silt swept down from the high mountains of Colorado and northern New Mexico. Clear and clean in its origin, it ripples, cascades, twines among the roots of grasses and old trees, pulling out little by little the stitches and seams of earth, dissolving, loosening, transporting mountain slopes grain by grain onto the level land. Flowing out from the base of the mountains, it splits the black, basaltic crust
that shields the plain. It wedges itself down through the high-piled gravels of vanished times and climates. Arroyos, sandy drainage-gutters for the violent summer rains, empty their fierce burdens of rolling earth and rock into the river. The Chama enters from the west, stained with the red sandstones beyond Gallina, with the yellow clay of Tierra Amarilla. After the Chama enters the water is never clear again until it is lost in the Gulf of Mexico, swept away and dispersed in the blind tides of ocean.

Just below the bridge at Otowi the river which has been spreading widely between its gravelly banks begins to flow past strong resistant rock into a canyon formed by two great mesas. The Indians call the spot Po-sah-con-gay, "the place where the river makes a noise." As she listened that night, Edith Warner began to hear more than meaningless noise in the sound of the water. The river seemed to make of its noise a song, a song she told me she thought of through the years as the melody of living. She watched the darkness well up out of the valley like a tide rising from the bottom of
an extinct sea. For awhile, after the sun went down, the sky at the edge of the eastern horizon grew more luminous. The mountains flushed with rose that faded slowly. The two mesas on each side of the river seemed to grow larger as though they were being drawn from the earth by a giant hand. The one on the east the Indians called Shumo, on the west To-tavi. The band of dark lava crowning them made them look awesome to Edith but not fearful. They were like two ancient beings who have seen much, she thought. For many thousands of years the river had torn its way between these mesas. Clouds had burst over them, dusty winds assailed them. The sky had leaned upon them with all its weight of light and darkness. Now they stood firm, balanced between the upthrusting, the down-pulling forces in the earth. In these strong shapes time itself became visible, time that works through the years to bring forth from all things the lines of essential beauty hidden in them.

As the stars began one by one to fill the deep sky above her, Edith Warner found the great age and deep-rootedness of the mesas comforting. Through them she felt connected with a source of strength within herself, something as old as the mesas, as wise, as unshakable. Utterly alone though she was on this first evening, she felt that the wordless land had accepted her and that if she too had endurance, life in the little house could be deeply satisfying.
THE SECOND DAY was cold and rainy. Toward afternoon Edith heard hoofbeats on the bridge and looked out to see two young Indians entering the yard on horseback. One of them was Adam. Though she had seen him only twice before, on this lonely morning he seemed like an old friend. When they had dismounted he greeted her with a shy smile and said, "This is my cousin Richard. I brought him to help me unload the oats. The trainmen want to take the empty car tomorrow."

As they discussed the weather and the freight arrangements she saw that these cousins were alike only in their sense of humor and the way in which they wore their hair. Even in those days many of the younger Indians continued to keep their hair cut short after they finished school. But Adam and Richard let theirs grow, parted it in the middle, tied it with yarn and brought the braids forward to hang over their shoulders. Adam was short and compactly built, while Richard was lean and loose-limbed, with what Edith has described as the eyes of a mystic.

When the oats had been taken care of, she asked the two young men to come into the house to get warm. They were her first guests, and she eagerly made them tea. Wet and cold as they were, they drank it as though it were their favorite beverage. Later Edith learned always to keep a pot of coffee boiling for her Indian neighbors who could drink it all day long. Luckily she had already made a batch of oatmeal cookies, and she watched them disappear while her visitors looked bashfully about. At first all three were at loss for conversation. Finally Richard said solemnly of the packing box around which they had been sitting, "This is a good table you made." Laughter broke the restraint and then Adam said, "Already
the house is different. It looks nice.” As they left he turned to her and asked with a real note of concern, “You aren’t afraid here by yourself?”

“Not very much,” she assured him, yet that night as mist and darkness shut out her guarding mesas she found herself facing for the first time “this thing called being afraid.” The solitude itself did not alarm her. “I feel very small and of little worth in the presence of great spaces and deep silence,” she said, “but not afraid.” Having so little of material worth and a locked door she told herself, she had no reason to fear man. Only those who have security must be concerned lest they lose it. But in spite of her brave thoughts, she felt a vague uneasiness.

Just what she would have done in case robbery of the station were attempted she never knew. A few weeks later someone gave her a revolver and the grapevine carried word through the valley that loiterers after dark would be asked no questions. One night she awoke with an uneasy feeling that someone was near. Clouds partially covered the moon, but there was enough light for her to see a man run from the screen door toward the bridge where he had tied his horse. She opened the door and clutched the gun with trembling hands. As she fired a shot into the air, horse and rider galloped away, and she was again alone in the stillness of the night.

At the end of the first week a woman friend came out from the East to stay through the summer and help get the house in shape. A practical nurse by profession, Lottie Weidaw was older and more experienced than Edith; she was ruggedly built and possessed of a good sense of humor which offset her tendency to be somewhat dour. Independent though the women hoped to be, it soon became evident that the work was more than the two of them could accomplish. A man was needed to build cupboards and closets, to cut windows in the corner room, to make a fireplace. Without an automobile, with scarcely any money to pay wages, how could they find anyone to work for them?

Then Edith thought of Ignacio, her old friend at the pueblo whose story of Awanyu had first set her heart upon this path of life. Perhaps he would know someone at the pueblo who could help them.
As the women crossed the bridge and walked the long road to the village, Edith remembered the first time she had gone to San Ildefonso with John Boyd. On that day it had been a land golden under the afternoon sun, with clouds casting their shadows as they moved like great birds in a blue sky. Today the cottonwoods along the river had green leaves and in the fields beside the road spring wheat was pushing up through the bare earth. Chamisa was changing its winter gray for a soft new green. After they passed the wide arroyo the road wound between low hills and fields where fragrant wild plum thickets bloomed along the acequias. There was smoke rising from the chimneys of the pueblo, and beyond it the Black Mesa standing alone beside the river. The Indians call the mesa Tunyo, which means “a spot by itself.”

As they drew near Ignacio’s house, Florencita, the granddaughter whom Edith had first known as a toddler ran to meet them. She had grown to look like her mother, Rosalie, with big eyes as black as the bangs above them and a broad smile. Her English was limited to “hello,” “goodbye,” “candy,” and “thank you,” but this was never an obstacle to the games she kept urging Edith to play with her. Soon Rosalie came to the door and with a smile said, “Oh, you come at last. We’ve been looking for you. Come in.”

When she asked for Ignacio, Rosalie consulted her mother-in-law, Susana. Then she said, “My father and Joe are in the fields down near the river, but they will come soon. My mother says you must wait.”

While Lottie busied herself exploring, Edith went to sit on the doorstep with the children. “In this country,” she had discovered, “there is need to sit quietly now and then—to look, to listen, to feel.” Even the children were quiet as they ate tortillas. The shadow of the round kiva lengthened across the swept earth of the plaza as it had on that other summer evening. It was hard to realize that six years had passed. Now she had come to live as neighbor to the people of San Ildefonso, and to share their sacred world.

A sound of wagon wheels woke her at last from her reverie. The children shouted “Tay-tay” as they ran to meet their grandfather. Soon they came round the corner of the house clinging to Ignacio’s hands, telling him how long his visitors had been waiting. After
greetings and the casual words that always prepare the way for real Pueblo conversation, Edith explained her need. Ignacio and the women talked together at great length in Tewa. Then he told her he thought his son Joe might help them. "He can take you to town in his car for the things you need. Then he will go there to do his work. When he comes in we'll ask him and see what he says."

Ignacio's idea was just what she had hoped for and she eagerly waited for Joe to finish putting up the horses. When he came in he greeted the visitors with friendliness and humor. "Why don't you catch some of the burros down there so you won't have to walk?" he asked. After a good laugh the way opened easily for them to work together. Joe agreed to his father's proposal, he was willing to let her pay as she was able, and the two women walked back to the river and over the bridge again with the warm glow of knowing they were no longer strangers in the valley.

Having Lottie with her that summer was a great blessing for Edith. She knew she could never have survived the difficult first months without the older woman's help. She soon realized, however, that her need for solitude was greater than her need for companionship and that as soon as she could she must go her way alone. After Lottie moved to Santa Fe where she could more easily practice as a nurse, Edith usually had friends with her only for short visits. Her life was filled by the guests she served in increasing numbers and by her warm contacts with the Indians at the pueblo.

It was through the problem of remodeling the little house that Edith's life first began to be knit with the San Ildefonso people.
From the beginning they felt a pride in being able to help her. Realizing how close she lived, like themselves, to the verge of poverty, there was none of the sense of patronage so many Indians feel with white people who are endlessly trying to “improve” things for them. Joe Aguilar turned out not only handsome but dependable and the work went swiftly—swiftly at least for this land where time is not marked off into hurrying segments but ripens according to ancient rhythms like the fruit of a tree.

Before the tearoom was entirely ready for business, people began stopping in to ask for cold drinks and sandwiches. Ice came out from Santa Fe on the freight train. Between freight days Coca-Cola bottles were hung in the well. Butter and milk were kept in a “desert refrigerator” cooled by evaporation.

At first the only customers were those who were native to the region, their pockets often as penniless as Edith’s. Spanish-Americans galloped up to the door and asked for tobacca Dukey,” for crackers and sardines. Covered wagons crossed the bridge and stopped beside the road. From under their canvas covers little children looked out, while an older boy and girl might climb down over the wheel and run in to ask “Have you a store? How many candies for a nickel?” Sometimes they wanted cigarettes for the father who held the horses, or a lemon for a coughing child. The whole family would be on the way to their ranchito up on the plateau where they planted pinto beans. All summer long the wagons went up and down from the bean fields above to the chile fields below. Edith found she missed them when the harvest was over and the children went back to school.

All sorts of cars from Model T’s to occasional Packards stopped for gasoline at the old pump. The hand crank was so hard to work that she was relieved when the driver wanted only two gallons, even though such a small quantity did not pay. If the driver told her to fill the tank she learned to suspect that he might say “I pay you pretty soon, maybe next time I sell a calf.” Sometimes the calf was never sold and her meager profit for the month would be wiped out.

One day when she was especially discouraged an old man and his son came in for sandwiches and coffee. They were both incredibly homely, with the heavy odor about them of clothes and bodies
long unwashed. They had come down to the valley from their little bean ranch near Los Alamos to celebrate the feast of Santiago. Now they were waiting to go home in the mail truck. It was almost noon and the walk across the valley had made them thirsty. When Edith filled their cups a second time the old man asked how much he owed. She knew his family was large and his ranch small, so the amount she asked was half the usual charge. When he paid he shook her hand and said, “I always like to help a poor lone woman.” She thought his “help” referred to the lunch he had bought. It was only after he left that she found the dime he had left under his plate.

“I decided then that there are compensations for being ‘poor’ and ‘lone,’” she tells us.

So slim her margin always was that most of the time there was no margin at all, when even a dime under the plate could tip the precarious balance. There were times when the whole venture would seem impossible, when she felt as though she were clinging by her fingertips to the brittle edge of a precipice. If she let go it would mean destruction, not just of the business that was her livelihood but of the web of peace and beauty her spirit had begun so delicately to spin out of itself. Yet no matter how marginless her existence, how uncertain the immediate future, she learned that in time a solution would present itself.

“This afternoon as I ironed,” she says in the fifth year of her life in the little house, “I was thinking about money. Unexpectedly during the week enough had come in to pay a bill that I did not see how I could meet. I recalled how frequently that had happened when I had done what seemed to me my utmost. I recalled, too, how a wise old man had taught me not to worry about such things. But habit is strong, nor have I learned to live as simply as he. Yet each year I do less of the customary things of our civilization.”
In the beginning the Indians at the pueblo found it hard to understand how Edith Warner could live alone at the place where the river makes a noise. How anyone could live alone was a mystery to them, much less a fragile little white woman in her early thirties with no sign of a husband or any other family. It was unheard of for an Indian’s life not to be bound up in community. Even their prayers were communal, the great seasonal dances where long lines of men and women and often tiny children merged into one pattern of movement and sound and color.

The Indians have established a moving relationship with the land they dwell in. They live in community not only with each other but with earth and sky, with plants and animals. They consciously play their part in maintaining the wholeness of the universe; wholeness or holiness—it is more than a play on words. It is the recognition of the common spirit that animates all life.

I have never forgotten a dance I watched at Taos Pueblo one winter afternoon. Entering the pueblo lands was like crossing an invisible line into another world. The gray branches of the wild plum coiling like smoke along the borders of the unploughed fields, willows glowing warm beside the stream, the tall shape of leafless cottonwoods, the silent vegetation, the guardian mountain—it was as though industrial man and all his works had been forgotten or had not yet been dreamed.

The pueblo was clean and bare in the winter sun. On the rooftops a few women were gathered in their colored shawls, with small children leaning against them, waiting, expectant. Suddenly there came a hurrying chorus of men, fifteen, perhaps, or twenty. Two of them carried a huge gray dried hide folded lengthwise. Some of the others held small drums; the rest carried notched sticks. They
gathered in front of the arched gateway to the church and each pulled a low stool from behind the wall. Seated in an oval around the spread hide they began drumming and chanting softly.

From three directions came groups of young girls and men, each group singing by itself, with no concern for the confusion of sound as the groups came together. The girls formed a circle around the seated chorus, stretched out their arms, their spread fingers making a repetitive gesture as though they were gently smoothing the sown earth. Round in a circle they moved, smiling, delicately treading, their arms rayed toward the center where the dark mystery was being entreated, a mystery that was at the same time joyful and full of gaiety. Around the women moved a great circle of men, round and round to the right, walking, not dancing, closely formed; between the two circles it was almost impossible to see the faces of the singing men at the center. The voices were gentle, yet full of power. The drums beat softly in a pattern of sound repeated over and over, the rhythm exact and undeviating in every measure.

At the end of the movement sudden cries, as though in triumph. Then a brief interval of silence, of relaxation; then the same pattern repeated endlessly, patiently, but each time, though the movement of the dance was exactly the same, the detail of the song was varied. The motions of the young girls were gentle and caressing as though they were radiating power from the tips of their fingers into whatever lay at the center of the circle. Continuing throughout the movement was a strange sound, the back-and-forth sawing of notched sticks. At the end of the afternoon the circle suddenly loosened; the grouped figures went off in their several directions toward the kivas, laughing, at ease, gay like children who have played together for an afternoon.

No wonder, I thought, that we white people watch the Indian ceremonials with such envy. We have not lived long enough on this continent to mingle the earth with our dreams. No wonder, too, that Edith Warner, in spite of her closeness to the Pueblo people—or even because of it—was often very lonely.

“I remember asking her almost casually once,” her goddaughter, Peter Miller, wrote me, “if she wasn’t sorry not to be an Indian, and realizing from her answer how awful it was to be shut out from
sharing by her white skin.” It was not her white skin so much as all that lived inside it, that long inheritance of history and culture from far away lands which makes us seem alien still to our Indian neighbors.

“Since there was so little of the Indian ritual she was able to share,” Peter’s letter continues, “she made her own out of simple, natural things. Gathering pine knots was part of it—‘those multi-shaped legacies of long-forgotten trees’—lighting the Christmas fire, the first spring seed-sowing, the first snow in fall, the spring and autumn flight of the wild geese—this most especially, and all these things linked to the rhythm of earth and her life upon it. She used often to go to ‘high places.’ . . . She said it was a thing found in all religions—the need to go up for meditation. . . . She had a little shrine on To-tavi that she went to often. To-tavi seemed like an arm to her, a great sheltering embrace. In the very middle of that embrace she made a tiny shrine, just off the trail and so inconspicuous that I’ve often walked past it even when I was looking for it. In those last days before she died she used to send me there to tend it almost every day. I suppose she did it more for me than for herself, knowing that it was impossible to feel there anything but joy.

“You know how much involved she was in the life of the village. The gradual loss of ritual was terribly tragic to bear, and it was in this connection that she found it hardest to wait, not to push forward on her own instincts, but wait to be guided. It was a real torment to her often not to be able to leap into a gap and say what she felt. And sometimes she did. The lesson had to be learned again—wait, wait for the time to be ripe, wait for somebody to be able to bear the words.”

In her own journal Edith tells us:

One learns through the years to stand alone and to find within one’s own soul most of what one needs. But there are times when the utter aloneness and apartness overshadows the compensations; when all the treasured little things such as Sayah’s “my grandchild,” Quebi’s “I wish you were going too,” Oqua’s long-planned Christmas gift, turn to ashes. Nana would tell me at such a time to say a prayer and sing, forgetting myself.
And yet in spite of her loneliness she shared the human bond to an extent that is seldom possible for any white person. She exchanged the fruits of garden and kitchen with the women, held babies in her arms, played with the brown-faced toddlers, consulted the older men respectfully about her problems, listened late into the night while the young men unburdened their hearts to her. Many of her closest friendships were almost wordless. Perhaps it was her reticence that endeared her from the beginning to the Pueblo people, used as they are to the garrulous white man with his endless questions.

A journal entry describes how she went to San Ildefonso one day at dawn to watch a winter ceremony:

Just as I entered the plaza the door of the Deer House opened and a blanketed figure came out, followed by the dancers. The large plaza was still and unpeopled and I pressed close against the wall of an adobe house as they faced south and began the low song to which moccasin feet beat the earth with the lifted step that seems to take into the dancer strength from the mother earth. Bodies painted with black and white circles and spots I saw; red yarn fluttering on legs that moved in unison; embroidered kirtles and jangling foxskins; great collars of fur; gay feathers dancing on black hair; familiar faces intent on the prayer song. All that my eyes saw bit by bit, while the rich low tones of the song and the rhythm of the movement filled me. From the earth itself and from the house made of earth it flowed into me and I can find no word for it.

As the dancers faced the east and the blanketed leader called to the earth spirits within the center of their universe around which they were dancing, the sun rose. . . . To the sun, the life-giver, that song seemed to go, and into the plaza the sun-power to come into those bodies so concentrated on the prayer.

And then from out the house against which I leaned came that old one whom I call Sayah, which is "grandmother." I bent to her embrace with that feeling of almost awe which I experience when I realize her faith and love. We have only the few Tewa and Spanish words I know, but there is between us an understanding that needs few words. I had not seen her for several weeks, and she had
been ill, which made it not an ordinary meeting, so that I was much aware of what she meant to me as I turned again to watch the dancers.

Until they had completed the square and gone into their house I watched, and then went in to warm myself by Sayah’s fire. In silence we stood there, her hand in mine. In memory that dance will always be associated with Sayah, and in that region where we are and have our being, the earth-feeling which came from the dance and its background will be mingled with that which came from her.

Since it was María and Julián from whom Edith rented her house, she was always especially close to them and to their children. María of San Ildefonso is not only a great artist and crafts­woman; she is also a wonderfully wise and rich-hearted human-being. I first knew her when I was a little girl in Pajarito Canyon. Though I have seen her seldom through the years she always has a warm smile for the child I used to be. Through her serene eyes I return to the long-ago time when life was simple and the Indian world I was just beginning to know seemed like a fairytale.

María has not had an easy life but she has walked the trail from beginning to end in beauty. It is easy to understand how much she meant to Edith. Whenever there were personal problems to solve or things in the village worried her, it was to María that Edith turned for counsel. One day when María knew that Edith was troubled, she left her work and went over the bridge to see if she could help—and help she did.

Edith many times did the same kind of thing for María. Through the years the two women shared both their wisdom and the burdens of their hearts with one another. It is of María that Edith has written, “I count her as one of the finest of women and feel it an honor to hold her as a friend.”

With the men of the pueblo she had a different bond. Among the Indians whose life is so organized in community there is little individual sharing, little chance for groping thought to be expressed. Degrees of kinship determine every relationship and custom governs almost completely the meshing of men’s minds. Loneliness is some-
thing that few Pueblo Indians have learned to live with—the loneliness that every man must suffer who dares to step out of the safe framework of all he has been taught and seek his own answers to the riddle of being human. The communal life can be as lonely as any other for a man who finds his spirit imprisoned in it. In Edith these men found someone they could talk to. She had an intuitive understanding of their loneliness and never made them feel ashamed of the inward twistings of their hearts, or of their childlike sallies of sudden fun.

She had been living only a few weeks beside the Rio Grande when a middle-aged Indian came walking into the yard. A red bandana kept the bangs and sidelocks of his graying hair from blowing in the June wind. The years had begun to round his thin shoulders a little, though he was not yet old.

Joe Aguilar looked up from his work to tell her that this was Juan Estevan Roybal, Adam’s father-in-law, whom she came to know by his Indian name of Chai. He clasped her hand loosely in greeting, and said haltingly, for he had very few words of English, “I look for my cows.” She guessed that the cows were only an excuse and that he had really come to satisfy his curiosity about the white woman who lived at the bridge where even the Indians refused to stay because of loneliness. She invited him to come and rest before
continuing to hunt his cattle, and led the way into the little sitting room.

He walked around the room slowly, looking carefully at the pictures, the books, the pottery. Then he turned, and with a solemn face he said, “Usted muy rico”—You are very rich. This startled her, but in her meager Spanish she answered him, “Oh no, muy pobre.” He laughed heartily; then at ease as though delighted to find that she knew how to joke, he sat down and lit a cigarette, forgetting all about the wandering cattle.

Chai came frequently that summer, talking little and smoking much, for he was a man of few words and fewer friendships. The rico-pobre exchange never varied; it became the pattern of similar repartee, and the play-on-words all Indians delight in. She was never quite sure what he thought of her until the day he suddenly handed her a five dollar bill. When she looked puzzled he told her, “Always you say you are poor. I bring you some money.” It was probably the only cash he possessed, for his income, she knew, was both small and uncertain. It was hard to make him understand the difference between being poor, as they both were, and being destitute, but only when she promised to tell him if she were really in need would he let her give the money back.

Through the first winter and spring when she was alone beside the bridge, Chai came often from the pueblo to see if she were all right and to sit with her, especially on days when the winds were at their worst and he knew that she might be fearful.

Six years later, in the time of whirling spring wind, she wrote:

It is hard to watch Chai draw slowly toward the end, drawing deep within himself, facing alone the unknown trail. He no longer speaks, just moves his head when I touch his hand. . . . He has been known as a silent man, holding himself apart. But to me he has talked a little of himself, his worries, his thoughts, during the long hours beside the fire. He has that love of fun and laughter that is typical of the Pueblo people. . . . I realize now that the game he invented of teaching me Tewa was more than fun. It helped to bridge the gulf of racial heritage between us. It was a reaching toward each other that comes in friendship.
On the last day of April she wrote:

Chai is gone. Yesterday when I went to his house I found only his body wrapped in his old blanket. Sobs shook me, for I loved him. He no longer needed the broth and custards I had brought him. I could only gather apple and wild plum blossoms, and go back to watch through the night, remembering the years of our friendship.

This morning they took his body to the church for burial. . . . I came sobbing home along the road he had followed so many times, aware only of loss, of emptiness. Finally I looked upward toward the west, and there came like a flash the deep certainty that he had but preceded me and gone on to the mountains. I somehow knew that he was happy, and lest I make it difficult for him to do his work, I must not mourn.

I came slowly along the river road, the hereafter touching me closely for the first time. This afternoon clouds covered the clear sky of morning and a gentle rain fell. My friend has gone, but he has sent the rain. Now when the winds blow, when the rain falls gently, when special days come in the pueblo, he will be near, and I shall be happily aware of him. Without a vital friendship between us, such awareness could not exist.

TO BE CONTINUED IN THE NEXT ISSUE