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THE HOUSE
AT
OTOWI BRIDGE

The Story of Edith Warner

by
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“THERE is an evening star with a small one quite near it,” Edith Warner remarks in her journal, “I cannot recall that before. Usually it is a solitary, lonely one. I am glad there are two together.”

One often wonders what Edith’s life would have been without Tilano. He was as much a part of the little house as the river that flowed past it, as the mesas from which Edith drew her strength. In the beginning he was to me only the elderly Indian who did the chores and who was always gentle and merry with my little boys. They followed him everywhere. When he went to the well he lifted them so they could peer down it, amazed at the bright eye of water shining in the round depth, helping him hand-over-hand to lift the splashing bucket on its pulley. They followed him among the cottonwoods where the cow hid herself, and to the corrals to gather eggs, and to pick up feathers from the fanning tails of the white turkeys. But it was only little by little that he became a person to me, that I realized the dignity and wisdom beneath the banter we used with one another.

He had one of the kindest faces I have ever seen, a kindness blent with humor, a network of wrinkles that seemed not so much age as laughter. His hands, when he would take mine in greeting, had a curious dry warmth, a wiry strength. They gripped mine as lightly as a bird that perches on a finger.

At the time when the path of his life first merged with Edith’s he must have been close to sixty. It was an afternoon in June of that first summer. Work had been going slowly on the west room which was to serve as store and tearoom. The man who had promised to build the corner fireplace kept delaying in the casual Indian manner. It had been hard for Edith to get used to the way things
move slowly in this land, to learn that for the Indian time has no boundaries, that every project must ripen according to seasonal rhythms and invisible inner laws.

One day when Adam came to take care of the freight he said with a note of achievement in his voice, "My Uncle Tilano is bringing the adobes for the fireplace in his wagon. Tomorrow he will come to build it."

"My Uncle Tilano" was Atilano Montoya, governor of the pueblo that year, and Adam's great-uncle. He came rattling over the bridge that afternoon, driving a team of white horses. After unloading the adobes he came into the house to sit awhile, to rest and talk, as Indians do so seldom, about himself.

How amazed Edith Warner was to learn that this gently aging man whose hair hung in black braids almost to his waist, had traveled far. He had crossed the ocean, had seen in his youth the great cities of history—London, Paris, Berlin, Rome. When Edith told him that she came from Philadelphia his eyes had lighted up. "Philadelphia!" he said. "I've been there. When I came back from Europe I stopped in Philadelphia for awhile. Then I came home to the pueblo."

With only a little coaxing he unfolded the story she was to hear so often. A group of Indians from San Ildefonso had gone to Coney Island one summer to display their dances. There Bostok, the animal trainer, had seen them and asked them to go with him on tour.

"Paris was the best place," Tilano said. "We stayed there a long time—maybe a month or more. The people liked us and clapped lots when we came out on the stage. When we walked on the street they crowded around us and asked, 'Are you American Indians?' Soon we learned some words of their language and could answer them."

"What did you dance?" she asked him.

"The Eagle dance," Tilano answered. "But not like here in the pueblo. There we didn't paint our bodies, and we used any kind of feathers to make the eagle wings and tail, but the French liked it."

To paint the body, to use eagle feathers would have made the dance too close to sacred ritual. Even with their bodies unpainted the dancers seem to be more than men. Their beaked headdresses
give them the piercing, penetrating look of birds. Their feathered arms become wings. So delicately they balance in their movements, they tread the hard ground as though it were made of air. The strong rhythm of the drum, the soaring voices of the chorus lift them above the earth.

What had the French people felt, Edith Warner wondered, as they watched the eagles, knowing nothing of the land to which they belonged, its heights and colors, the bare mesas, the foaming clouds, the enormous arcs of rainbow? Had Tilano, as he danced, seen the sacred mountains shining—north, south, east, west—that had guarded his childhood?

While he talked, though his mind had seemed to be far away among the years, he had been thinking about her fireplace. “I will bring a helper in the morning,” he said as he rose to leave. “This dirt is no good for mud. I'll have to get some good clay from near the village.” He seemed to know just the shape the fireplace needed to give the ordinary room a note of charm. In two days the job was finished, and the first fire lighted—the first of many fires that Edith and Tilano lit together—sending its sweet blue smoke upward like a plume.

I do not know exactly when it was that Tilano came to live permanently at the little house. In his own way he was as much alone as Edith. His wife had died in childbirth, in the second year of their marriage. Because of his long absence as a young man from the pueblo he was in danger of becoming rootless. Through his association with white people he had begun to know how it feels to be an individual. His integration in the communal life had been weakened. His natural sociability had already begun to find the fatal outlet in drink which often expresses the loneliness of the Indian who has become lost between two worlds. Edith was troubled about him, often deeply troubled. She felt, as only a woman could feel, that he needed the discipline of a home almost as a child needs it. His work on the little house had given him the feeling of belonging to it. He was uncle to those whose land it stood on. What wonder that she at last suggested that he come and live there instead of driving to and from his daily tasks across the bridge? What wonder that he agreed to come, saying only, “You need a man to help you.”
The relationship between them is hard to define. They were not man and wife. There was a great deal of the maternal in her care for him, though he was old enough to have been her father. We used to laugh at how bossy Edith sometimes was. The child in Tilano could be stubborn and provoking as children often are. She must have given him the peace and security he needed, for he was never known to drink from that time on. She found in him the masculine strength and wisdom that kept her own life in balance, and a spirit of playfulness that had been lacking in her own serious upbringing. He is woven into her Christmas letters like the pole around which the years revolve.

Today Tilano and I went for Christmas greens . . . There were fresh deer and turkey tracks in the road and pieces of fir under a tree brushed by antlers. . . . Soon it will be Christmas Eve, and Tilano will light the little pitchwood fire out near the well house to welcome those spirits that draw near on that night. . . . Tilano and I began planting a garden on warm March days. . . . The garden where his father once worked has a special quality as well as its own charm. Even the bears came down to it this fall.

One evening as I washed dishes, the sound of a long story in Tewa reached me from Tilano’s room. When I went in later, a Pueblo boy was sitting where he could hear every word and expression. Tilano looking up with his face aglow explained, “I am telling Sandy about the Shalako!” This year his great desire to see the Shalako at Zuñi has been fulfilled, and he relives the experience with each eager word. . . . Tilano is making a feather headdress, bows and arrows, tiny doll moccasins with silver buttons, for the boys and girls to whom he is a special friend. . . . Tilano’s room became a winter sitting room since all day it has sunlight, a wood conserver. On stormy days I read to him while he tied parrot feathers for the dancers. The radio brought music, news, and his favorite programs. . . . Perhaps when Tilano lights the little pitch fire on this Christmas Eve, the deer whose tracks he saw at the foot of the hill will pause and watch the flames carry up into the night and across the continent our Christmas wish for peace and beauty.
I like to think how Edith’s and Tilano’s lives were joined, not through the physical act of becoming parents, but by the responsibility they accepted together as godparents.

A young girl from the East, seeking a period of stillness before her marriage, was directed to Edith’s house in the roundabout way in which most of her contacts were made. She called herself “Peter,” a name that she loved because it means rock, or stone. It was Tilano who taught her how to find the god within the stone. She stayed with Edith two months, there where the river rolls the broken stones into music, where the rocks in the hidden canyons are covered with the gay and reverent drawings of an ancient people for whom everything that lived was both holy and humorous. Later on she was joined by the young man who was to be her husband, and there, with Edith and Tilano as witnesses, they were married.

To Tilano this meant far more than a perfunctory legal act. It meant that he had in the most true and serious sense become godfather to young Peter and Earle Miller; that Edith was now their godmother. Their duty toward them both was that of spiritual guidance. Among most Indian people there is a custom that a child is initiated into manhood by a ceremonial father or mother. He is “reborn” out of the closely protected circle of his parental family into the responsible life of the tribe to which he belongs. He is made aware, by a vividly enacted symbolic drama, of the reciprocal powers of life and death, and of his own function as man in the rhythmic pattern of the cosmos.

The teaching that was given to this young couple was as private and as personal as love. Whatever Tilano could share of the great mysteries that are common to all mankind he shared with them reverently. “Those things that must not be told to white people” were never throughout his life repeated to anyone, not even to Edith, nor to those two who were their godchildren. The belief that religious truth should be imparted only to those whose hearts are prepared through slow maturing or through rigorous training is a very old one. The forces of life and germination which the Pueblo people understand so deeply, are as dangerous when handled without reverence as the energies which our own science has revealed within the atom.
All of us who spent any time at the river learned something from Tilano, if for some it was only the knack of letting the funny side of life exist always beside the serious. He never let us forget that laughter is of the gods, as all the Pueblos know. He was not above pinching our bottoms playfully, and because we knew him both as wise old man and ever-living child, dignified matrons that we were, we let him do it. The same voice that told Peter, as he guided her hand in gesture on the high sacred places, “Make your prayer now,” could also tease us with wolf calls if we appeared in jeans that hugged too tightly.

Tilano never failed to take his part in the ceremonial life of the village. It was after one of the annual winter feasts when he had danced all day that Edith wrote to Peter:

Godfather looked so worn when he finally emerged. I got him home and he never even went down to see the cow. I milked and fed animals. He went to bed before nine and slept till nine the next morning. The same was true this morning. I milked so he could eat his breakfast slowly. Now he looks rested. He came in a bit ago with a rabbit that was in his trap, and now he has gone for the mail, taking his gun, hoping he'll see another.

To impersonate the gods as animals, to step out of daily life and enter a circle of time as old as the zodiac, to put off his human thought so that the thought of the Divine Ones might come streaming through him, feeling that power surge through him to the waiting touch; at day’s end to go back, to become man again, to become the human self, heavy with years, exhausted as a child that has spent itself in play—this was the life that Tilano lived. This was what looked out through his wise and laughing eyes and touched in us all something older than memory.
BECAUSE I was preoccupied with my growing family—my second son was born in June of 1928, a month after Edith Warner came to live at the bridge—I scarcely noticed the transformation of the little house. I was sick a great deal of the time, and lay in bed indulging chronic sore throats and colds, rebelling against the lot of women, envying what I thought of as the freedom of men whose work took them outside the house and into adventures which I could not share. When I was well enough I used to run off to the mesas on my horse, or go to Santa Fe where my parents and girlhood friends were living, passing Edith’s house again and again and never stopping.

Gradually I became aware of a difference in the little house I hurried by so often. It seemed to squat less like an ugly duckling on its sandy acre. The warm brown of unpeeled pine slabs replaced the ugly board siding. There were strings of morning-glories as blue and cool as eyes of summer sky. New windows had been cut, the old ones widened. The vines that covered the well house fell over it in a green shower. Woodbine enclosed the screen porch in a cool shade.

One afternoon I brought my children to the river on a picnic. After they had splashed and played, stubbing their bare feet on the stones, daubing each other with the sticky mud, dirty and hot as we were, Edith invited us in for tea and cookies. When we stepped in out of the raw heat I was astonished to find that the little house had become charming. Juniper wood burned in the range with the fragrance of aromatic sunshine. There was the smell of bread that had just been taken from the oven and covered with a clean cloth on the table under the kitchen window. Black pottery plates stood
upright on open shelves along one wall, with cups and saucers in terra-cotta colors from Mexico. A cabinet without doors held mixing bowls and measures and rows of spices.

The room that had been only a store had been remodeled. The counter stood inconspicuously in one end. In the opposite corner was an adobe fireplace with graduated steps on each side holding the glossy black bowls for which the San Ildefonso women are famous. There were a table and chairs for tea guests. Orange candles and red-and-black striped Chimayo squares brightened the wall; a Navajo rug covered part of the rough floor.

Since we had come as neighbors rather than anonymous customers, Edith gave us tea that afternoon, as on so many others that were to follow, in the small bed-and-sitting room that faced the east. The walls were covered with burlap that was originally made for woolsacks. Because she had almost no money at all she contrived her effects in the simplest possible way. Joe Aguilar had made tables to fit under the windows, and a desk between a pair of bookshelves against the north wall. On top of the shelves Edith had placed an Acoma pitcher and decorated bowls in tan and black, with orange-and-blue basket plaques from the Hopi country, a Navajo doll and a pair of brass candlesticks. A tiny Indian rabbit carved out of white stone sat among the pictures on the narrow shelf above the desk. On the long table among plants and books and the kerosene lamp was a pottery figure from Cochiti. The girl who sold it to her called it the “singing lady.” In her journal Edith says that through the years it was this figure that became for her a symbol of woman’s place in the Indian world—and of her own.

I sat on the narrow bed against the wall looking through the long sliding windows toward the Sangre de Cristos. Even Edith who saw them daily could never quite fix those mountains in her mind.

Sometimes the light makes each range stand out, casting sharp shadows on the ones behind. Occasionally when the air is very clear, there is a strange and breath-taking shining light on the green aspen leaves. At evening the twilight may run quickly from the valley, shrouding almost at once the highest peaks. Or mauve and rose
move slowly upward, turning to blood-red on the snow above. One morning they may be purple cardboard mountains sharp-cut against the sky. On another they will have withdrawn into themselves. Sometimes I have watched ghost mountains with substance only in their dark outline. It seems then as if the mountains had gone down into their very roots, leaving an empty frame.

The tea she served us had a thin slice of lemon floating in it with a spicy clove. The chocolate cake that was to become a tradition for us all, from the smallest child to the world-famous physicists like Bohr and Fermi and Oppenheimer, was as tender and moist as a spring morning. For the children there was milk, and after they drank it they followed Tilano to the shed to stare at the cow who had given it, to play with her calf, and to run chattering back with an egg they had found in a hidden nest.

That first afternoon has blended in my mind with many others. Restless, I was forever running away in search of adventure and stimulation. One winter I drove away from the mesa in a blinding snowstorm, and then three hundred miles south along the Rio Grande to El Paso where the Chicago Opera Company had stopped to perform *Thais* on a tour westward. Another summer I took flying lessons from a pilot who was living briefly in the valley opposite the Black Mesa—until one of the other students cracked up the plane and killed himself and I realized that a young mother had perhaps more important things to do.

In between times I complained that my busy household left me no time for writing and that my husband, whose boarding-school duties kept him busy even during the evenings and on many weekends, gave far too little attention to his growing family.

How often I used to go to Edith, tense and frustrated, crying against my lack of companionship, against the strict routine of the school and what I thought of as its disparagement of everything feminine. How little I understood then the need of adolescent boys to live for a time in the disciplined world of men. How little I valued the worth of my own woman's life. My long hours of solitude with nature and with books and music yielded their harvest only many
years later. To Edith I magnified each household emergency and all the problems of relationship that inevitably arise in a small community.

She would listen as though she understood it all. Sometimes she seemed to agree, sometimes she only questioned gently. She never reprimanded nor did she ever express the envy I knew that she, the unmarried childless woman, must often feel of the secure and love-encircled life I scorned as though it were my prison. She would place a chair for me beside the kitchen table, and while we talked her hands moved endlessly about the task of daily bread. There were trays of fruit gathered at daybreak from the garden—for work in this tranquil-seeming spot began at dawn and ended long after the lamps were lighted. The garden was a quarter of a mile away. It was watered by a spring that had to be kept constantly cleared, and ditches opened to lead the thin trickle of water among the carrots and lettuce and raspberry bushes. Tilano did the heavy work, but Edith worked beside him, long hours on her hands and knees weeding and thinning the vegetable seedlings, pinching the tips of tomato plants, lovingly nursing the clumps of zinnias and marigolds.

Edith made her own jam and preserves, some from wild plum and chokecherry that grew in thickets along the ditches near the pueblo. Each autumn she canned dozens of jars of fruit and vegetables. She baked her own bread, relying as little as possible on supplies that would have to be ordered from Santa Fe and sent out by train. Her washing was usually done by women from the pueblo. Every drop of water was hauled from the well in buckets and Tilano had to be reminded to keep them filled. The lamps must be cleaned daily and the wicks kept trimmed. The big refrigerator burned kerosene and too often it went on strike and poured black smoke over everything. Dishwashing, with so many to serve and so much cooking, went on late into the night.

She was always too thin, thin as a reed by a salt marsh. When I put my arms around her in greeting I could feel the hips and shoulders as bony as a boy's. There was often a look of strain about her mouth until she broke into one of her pixie-like smiles. Some have felt that her life was too austere, so dedicated that there could
be no place in it for gaiety, yet her closest friends were those with whom she could be playful—from Tilano to the youngest child of the pueblo. It was when she smiled that I realized her face which had seemed so plain at first was really heart-shaped. Her firm chin came to a point like a resolute valentine. She could never have lived through her strenuous days if she had not learned to balance activity with moments of quiet and of pure joy.

"The other morning," her journal tells us, "I found that when I did not let things press too closely I kneaded bread rhythmically and with pleasure. I realized then that it was better to send people away sometimes without food than to have the mirror of my soul clouded.

"This is a day when life and the world seem to be standing still—only time and the river flowing past the mesas. I cannot work. I go out into the sunshine to sit receptively for what there is in this stillness and calm. I am keenly aware there is something. Just now it seemed to flow in a rhythm around me and then to enter me—that something which comes in a hushed inflowing. All of me is still and yet alert, ready to become part of this wave that laps the shore on which I sit. Somehow I have no desire to name it or understand. It is enough that I should feel and be of it in moments such as this. And most of the hatred and ill will, the strained feeling is gone—I know not how.

"Even in these rushed days," she writes in the hectic days just before Christmas, "there is such peace between. There are moments when two eagle feathers can fill me with joy; when the last rays of the sun touch my forehead as I stand by the kitchen door; when the outline of To-tavi is marked in rhythm against a clear western sky; when even the wind is part of it all. Surely such moments do something to me. If not, it is because I hide beneath the pettiness. I have no apparent goal. I know only that I am living a day at a time as I feel the way."

And again in one of the peaceful days in February: "I had almost forgotten how to lie curled on the ground or here on my couch, content just to look and feel and enjoy the thoughts that come. Rushing with things to be done crowding, is such a waste of living. There need to be hours of this."
It is almost impossible to imagine how she managed to find these moments of quiet in the midst of her busy life. For a long time she had the job of reading the river gauge on the bridge that measured the fluctuating stages of water for the flood control program of a government agency. To do this she must climb down the side of one of the supporting abutments, sometimes just over the swirl of a springtime flood. I remember how for two or three months each spring she suffered acute hay fever from the juniper pollen flying at the very time that the garden must be planted, often in days of seething wind. Her only times of rest came in late fall and early winter when the garden had been put to bed and visitors came seldom, when the solitude she loved remained for days unbroken. So harassed was she in summer by the constant how of people that she sometimes sent those she loved away from her, knowing that we would understand her need for self-collection.

I heard a visitor ask her once if she were ever frightened.
“By what?” she wondered in surprise.
“By the solitude,” the city woman imagined.
“Never,” Edith answered without hesitation. “Only people frighten me.”

The people who frightened her were those who guard themselves in trivial words to which she could never find an easy way of re-
responding, and with these she had to deal increasingly as time went on and the road past her house became more traveled.

“There was a time,” she writes, “when I sought to put out of my life or go away from those humans who irritated me or disturbed the rhythm of my being. Now that I have come this far on the way, I know that the only way is to become impervious to the irritation.” In a later note she corrects herself and says, “I am dubious. Perhaps it is I who am out of rhythm.”

In 1934 she was able to add a separate guest house built of adobe with a sheltered portal that faced the curve of the river. Here those seeking rest for tired bodies and more often for tired minds could come for a few weeks of quiet and solitude. Partly because she was so busy, partly because she had such faith in the healing quality of silence, Edith left her visitors very much to themselves. There were no modern conveniences. A pitcher and basin stood on the washstand beside the bed. Tilano kept the pitchers filled with water and laid sticks of piñon upright in the corner fireplace. Edith would light the fire for the weary guest and then smile and go away. At night each must walk, lantern in hand, along the stony path through the fragrant juniper shadow to the adobe privy that stood above the riverbank. Sometimes a coyote would cry, an owl call softly. The river rushed like a wind over its stones.

It was the simplicity of her life that we all envied, few of us realizing at what cost that simplicity was achieved.

“That month in her little guest house was one of the perfect experiences of my life,” a friend says in a letter. “I think I have never known anyone so quiet and reserved who became so much a part of one’s life and thinking—what priceless gifts of the spirit Edith had to give and how generously she gave them.”

“Edith loved the simile, ‘a flute of the gods,’” her goddaughter tells me. “She was always trying to keep herself clear and her heart right so that she could be a perfect instrument. She was as close to being completely free of self as anyone I have known.—And yet she too had her struggles, up to the very end.”

She barely hints at her own struggles in the dozen or so typed pages from her journal which were all she was content to share with other eyes—and there are no more entries after February of 1935.
She begins in September 1929:

It is a feast day at San Ildefonso. I am glad, so glad to be alive and here, with the past year of adjustment and illness only a memory. It is a fall day with great clouds and soft breezes from the south—the kind that draws my soul a-tiptoe.

Perhaps part of this exultant mood is due to what I saw this morning. As I went to the pueblo I recalled my first September Corn Dance. I had come on horseback from the mountains and stayed overnight. The babies I had held then were dancing today and from the shade of the big cottonwood I watched them. Just beyond me were the chorus and the dancers with an old two-storied house and the Black Mesa as a background. There were no cars, no curious tourists to mar the solemnity—only Indian children who belonged. Here where I know each one, it is faces I see; attitude I note; feeling I catch. The words of the song, the gestures of the chorus, the figure of the dance has no literal meaning for me, but I felt the intangible that permeated them. It was not similar to those moments when all of me seems drawn upward by the beauty of the night or the hills. It was more what one might feel in a Presence. And somehow there in that plaza guarded by the old, old cottonwood, the last dregs were drained from me. I can endure anything if now and then come such hours.

I ran away today, so sick I was of the kitchen and everlasting food. Constant walls and a roof do something to me at any time and when the aspens turn golden I revolt and leave everything.

My eyes are still seeing dancers, my ears still hearing the beat of the tombé and the rise and fall of voices. I should not have left whatever business there might have been, but when Awa asked me to go to Santa Clara this morning, I locked the door and went. I needed it.

Always the eagle dance fills me with something of the sky. Today I watched the dancers from such close proximity that I saw leg-muscles move. As I watched, oblivious of chorus and onlookers, there came something of the gods to those hovering, circling eagles.
Then from a housetop I looked down at the whirling, swooping dancers. Into the heights they took me—up where the god-powers dwell. That was a dance for the soul.

I told Quebi that if I were an Indian, I should want to be a man to dance as the men do. My body still seems to whirl and turn with them. But as I watch it in memory, the dance revolves around the women, the women who softly, lightly, slowly, with feet scarcely lifted from the ground, form the center of the movement. Pueblo women are like that—soft laughter, low voices, quiet steady movements, holding their men and their children through the life dance.

Twice within this week I have seen what must be meant only for the delight of the gods. I chanced to look up from my reading a bit ago, and went flying out to the river bank. My carved foothill was a shining thing of beauty. No artist could capture the gold that bathed it with wonder and set it apart. And while I looked in awe, from its earth-hold rose slowly a new color—a cloak of mauve only less bright than the gold that with a caressing movement wrapped itself about my golden hill. Only then could I look to faraway purple mountains and the Mesa which was quite black against a clouded sky. When I looked back to the hill the magic was gone. Can such beauty be and then not be? I think the gods must have taken back to themselves that godmade color—perhaps to paint themselves for an approaching ceremony. And I know that some of it came to stay with me.

The winds tried hard yesterday to blow away the snowfilled clouds . . . finally with a last great blast they went back to their caves and were still. All night and all day the clouds have hung low. . . . And from them have come rain and hail and snow to the thirsty earth. I had forgotten that snowflakes could fall so gently to make a curtain that shut out the world. Perhaps never before had I known snow like this, for the Pueblo people have been calling it to come.

Today they are dancing the Turtle dance—all the men and boys in ceremonial costumes with great collars of fir, with turtle shells
tied on knees, and with gourd rattles to mark the rhythm of the song. It is a long song that calls the rain to come and the earth to yield—the same that those ancients prayed when they lived in canions and on mesas. And perhaps then, as today, the snow fell in such stillness to the waiting earth. It seemed as though the gods came in the sky as great eagles who gave the soft white down from their breasts. It was in the hair of the dancers and on the breast of the earth—sent by the gods to those who forget not how to ask for it.

Just now as I watched the ever-changing beauty, I saw a cloud pass over the earth on long grey stilts of rain. And then as I looked I saw its shape and knew that over the pueblo moved the Thunder Bird. With wings outspread he slowly passed, broad tail sweeping the thirsty earth. Down from his breast fell feathers of rain and out from his heart the lightning flashed its message to the people that the gods never forget. Thunder roared from his long black beak and all earth sounds were hushed. He has gone, leaving only his mark on the land, but I still see his broad wings stretched, and the white rain-feathers dropping from his breast. And any fear, lingering from those childhood days when I, unafraid, was made to fear lightning, has gone. Did it not come from his heart? If it should seek me out or find me wandering in its path, would it not take me back with it? I should not mind going so much if I could look down on beauty like earth's today.

I have been sitting here looking at the peaked ceiling of two gray and one brown, one rough and one smooth board—the only roof for which I have any affection—wondering why such heights and depths have been given me. There are days when I question the gods. And then come the things that make me catch my breath. There are moments when this crude house, my little pottery singing woman, my books and pictures are filled with something that sends out to me peace. Is it because of an ancient prayer that color and form and movement have come to mean so much more, or is it that the years bring an increased vision—no, a more understanding vision? Is it a natural gift that accompanies maturity, or is it a gift of the gods?
I am glad that the years of adjustment are over and that there has come to me this new relationship with all of earth. I know that I was never so aware of the river and the trees; that I never walked so eagerly looking for the new wild things growing. I know that I have had to grow sufficiently—no, to cast off enough of civilization's shackles so that the earth spirit could reach me.

This morning I stood on the river bank to pray. I knew then that the ancient ones were wise to pray for peace and beauty and not for specific gifts except fertility which is continued life. And I saw that if one has even a small degree of the ability to take into and unto himself the peace and beauty the gods surround him with, it is not necessary to ask for more.
How different my own life was in the small community we called Los Alamos. Two thousand feet above the river, more than seven thousand feet above the level of the sea, our mesa might have been a different world. My house, close to the edge of the canyon that borders the mesa to the north, was two-storied, built of log and stone. The forest was at my back door, pine trees, some of them three feet in diameter, in which the summer wind made constant music. I had a small lawn and a garden of delphiniums, marigolds and zinnias, even a miniature pool made of an old bathtub in which goldfish swam and a water lily grew. There were wisteria vines over the window and a scarlet climbing rose by the front door. The children slept on a screened porch shaded by honeysuckle vines, and a crab-apple tree under which a family of skunks used to keep festival on moonlit autumn nights.

The school grew and many of the young masters married. The wives took turns at giving informal supper parties. Several of the men were musical; one sang; another played the violin. I often accompanied the singing of Bach chorales and Christmas carols and helped with practice for the Gilbert and Sullivan operetta which was produced each spring. My children grew and became amusing and companionable. They peer now from the pages of my own journal in moments of tenderness and laughter. The typed pages I have kept run through the same years as Edith’s. Like hers, they are filled with a love of nature, yet I realize now, that with only the distance of a few miles between us, we saw the world through wholly different eyes.
"August, 1929. The north window opens toward the canyon, by night a wild dark place. I can hear cattle bells that snap across the darkness from the mesa on the other side. Birds utter faint, far cries. The mountain has disappeared into darkness and the sky is only paling light above. Now the cattle bells rattle past the west windows. They sound like the voices of animate creatures seeking each other in the darkness.

"From my north window I can see a storm coming down from the mountains. The white mist spills over the arm of the mountain. I can hear the heavy rain beating across the canyon. Thunder rolls in antiphonal effect from peak to peak. The wind surges down from the mountains, spills into the canyons, wells up with an added strength against the house. The green curtains flatten themselves against the window as if they were hunted things. After all this frenzy of preparation at last only a few silly drops spill onto the metal roof of the garage. Was the storm only a pretense? No, the mist I thought was thinning has gathered again. It is marching nearer like the gray shadow of an army. A swift flame leaps across it and crashes into thunder. Now the rain wrestles with the wind for mastery in the tree tops. It pours down from the clouds like a river. How strange the trees look, like ghosts caught in a gray curtain. The rain is all between and among them. It is a world of the newly dead groping in a purgatory without color. Humans creep now beneath whatever little shelter they can, and whisper and touch cold hand to hand till the storm is past. They dare not be caught out when the rain gods march.

"February, 1931. It is colder tonight and the clouds have lifted. That which this afternoon was a mist, as soft and white as breath on frosty mornings, thin, formless, weightless, a fairy fog, has gone up into the sky. It has thickened around the moon like cream clotted on a pan of milk. A yellow light glows upon the snow. The mountains are faintly yellow. Trees shed faint blue shadows upon the snow, there are round pools of blackness south of each tree where no snow fell, or if it fell, it melted quickly off into the warm, moist earth.

"February, 1932. (A recollection in winter.) I can see the slopes
of Redondo as we started up, steep and shaggy with ancient fallen trees. The thin sunlight was something very old and faded that trickled through the heavy shadows of the trees still standing. I think of the myriads of violets growing among the rocks on the higher treeless slopes. How bitter and cold and windy it was, and yet there were violets. I remember after we came down again, the long trail along the thread of water before we reached our camp, my unspeakable weariness, the bathing my tired feet in the icy stream; then falling for a moment of bliss into deepest sleep.

"JULY, 1932. I watch from my window the rain falling out of the center of heaven, hardly veiling the mountains that are flooded with the light of evening. A double rainbow is the arch of the stage. The theater, where I sit, is dim. The mountains live and shine in glory. The field this side of the fence has been planted to sunflowers, deep, sturdy green, not yet in blossom. The poplar tree sings in all its leaves. Oh moment of wonder for which the whole of life might be lived!

"NOVEMBER, 1932. The baby sits on the bed, sleepy and hungry, waiting for his supper, knowing beyond the shadow of doubt that he will be fed. He is so young, so isolated from this world and all its trouble, its aspiration, its bitter failure, its tremendous courage to begin again.

"FEBRUARY, 1933. Allen has gone across the fields to let Buffy out of the kennels. He is not yet five and sings and skips as he goes, songs without words, sounds of delight. He is breaking the ice on the roadside ditch, pounding it with his little shovel. Teddy comes to join him, but the seven-year-old has work to do and I send him back to it. 'Shades of the prison house!'

"MARCH, 1933. Today the air is so heavy with dust that not even the Jemez mountains a few miles away are visible. There are no mountains in the world, only the gaunt trees like shadows in the dusty air, and a sullen wind moves blindfolded among the trees.

"JULY, 1934. Today I thought, watching the thin shower of rain falling at the end of the mesa, Oh why doesn't it fall here? And then rejoiced that some little thirsty spot on these mesas was getting it even if it wasn't this one. It's all the same earth, I thought. Anywhere that rain falls is healing for the earth.
"AUGUST, 1934. The moon last night made a porpoise or a dolphin out of black cloud and haloed it with silver. Today is the most shining green and gold early autumnal day. I walked down the mesa at noon and heard the wind like the swish of long taffeta skirts in the corn. The tassels of the corn were deep maroon. I sat at the edge of the growing field of winter rye and saw it moved by the quick wings of little birds. Coming home I found wild white flowers like tiny moonflowers in the grass, with an exquisite delicate perfume like petunia but far more subtle.

"JULY, 1937. I stopped in the baby's room a moment to listen to him sleeping and as he lay and breathed so softly I remembered the winter week when he was so ill and I so frightened, and how in the night I would think I could not hear him breathe, and would go beside him and listen, that breath so troubled and so faint. How lightly strung upon life we are, like beads upon a string.

"The thunderstorm has passed. The mesa is still in shadow, but the horizon is bright. There are new curtains at the window, homespun, the color of the afterglow upon the Sangre de Cristo. There is the smell of hot gingerbread baking for supper. Soon we will sit down at the table, I and the husband and sons for whom I prepare the daily bread. We will break our bread carelessly, we who have never had to worry about where our next meal is coming from. It is likely that we will forget to give thanks, taking life so for granted.

"But I think: The sun shines upon us now. Eat and drink deep, husband and sons. Grow strong. For all life is a debt that must one day be repaid. From those who have received much, much will be demanded. There may be darkness to the extent that we have received light. In the dark time life will not give to us as we are used to be given to. But the courage to live will be demanded of us still. Eat and drink deep, oh husband and sons."

Only a little of the shadow side of our lives is preserved in these journal entries, for like Edith, I long ago discarded the fretful pages that dealt with my inner struggles and discontents. The rest has blown away with the chaff, or forms part of the compost at the roots of time.
LITTLE BY LITTLE the noise of the river changed, the river of time upon which our lives had been carried so peacefully. The stain of war began to mingle with its current. The events that uprooted us came suddenly in the end, yet for years there were premonitions. They echoed deep within us, almost unnoticed, like the rolling of a pebble, the trickle of dust grains, the faint quiverings that precede a landslide.

In 1938 I made this entry in my journal:

"Violent nature intruded stubbornly on the calm of daily life last night. The music we tried to hear was made inaudible by static worse than I have ever heard on the radio. A newscast explained that a tremendous electro-magnetic hurricane had taken place about one o’clock the preceding night, effectively blotting out all short-wave communication for several hours. It was the largest such storm ever to be recorded. A coyote apparently caught in a trap not far away wailed and shrieked in spirals of sound that sent shivers up and down our spines and took us back to our primitive history when men’s houses were fragile islands of safety against which the wilderness beat like threatening waves. In the middle of the night I felt my bed rock and tremble gently as though in the beginning of an earthquake. Poor earth, I thought, so harassed tonight by nature and by man, bombarded by electric particles from space, torn and bruised by man’s devices of war, what wonder that you should dream of shaking loose this plague that has fastened itself upon you, and tremble as you dream?"

During the spring of 1940 we hung upon our radios listening to the saddening reports of the invasion of France. Far away as we were, we felt the ancient wounds begin to open. I remember how
desperately I tried at first to escape from awareness of what was happening, to take my children's hands and flee beyond the reach of history. On June 30 my journal says:

"We got clear away into an almost inaccessible canyon, and then miraculously all the cares and strains of the past weeks began to drift away like the network of ripples on water when the wind ceases. Here in the canyon were no books of opinion, no newspaper headlines, no blare of radio with its undercurrent of panic. There were only the great sky and the ancient rocks, the stir and surge of wildflowers blooming, the sound of the rippling brook. There were beaver dams, and the mirror-like water spread out under tangled thickets, the unhurried wise old fish moving in the water, dew on the tall weeds and grass, birds calling and hurrying, the footprints of bear and mountain cat on the trail, masses of wild strawberries under tall rock shadows. How far away war seemed. Time stood still in this great moment of peace and beauty."

The news of Pearl Harbor was like a dream at first. We had eaten our midday dinner at the Lodge, the school's great dining hall with the portal that faced across lawns and gardens to the east. It was a sunny Sunday afternoon. The air was warm and brilliant. The valley below the mesa brimmed with light. Whoever first heard the startling news over his radio spread the word quickly. War had been for so long only a tangle of words in the air around us it seemed hardly possible that it could actually touch our lives.

By February of 1942 the academic headmaster, Lawrence Hitchcock, then a major in the Army reserves, was called to active duty. My husband became acting headmaster and in addition to his load of teaching was harassed by the problem of finding replacements for those of the staff who were leaving at the end of the year to enter the Armed Forces. He worked late into the night those months, and when he came to bed tossed and turned restlessly. I listened, like all anxious wives, to the speeding tempo of his heart-beat that seemed to echo the speeding tempo of our days.

One morning in the spring of 1942 I walked to the edge of the canyon and sat dreaming for awhile under the branches of a fir tree. The air was gossamer. A haze of subdued light lay over rock and tree. I watched thunderheads build up in the north over Tsacoma,
the sacred mountain. A tiny spider spun a web from the twig of a barberry to my knee and back again.

But roughly upon the edge of peace that day an airplane droned, circling back and forth among the clouds, from the river to the mountain, south along the flowing hills on the horizon, out of sight, and then suddenly back again. It flew low, methodically. The sunlight glinted from its silvery structure. It was then I first knew without doubt that a time was ending. Not even here on these mesas was isolation possible. We too were vulnerable to change. The narrow trails cut in the ancient rock could not be defended against the invading future.

On the first of May we waked to the sound of an extraordinary wind. The sky that had been limpid at daybreak darkened. The sun was muffled, though there were no clouds. The bright air was choked with dust that stung our faces and burned our eyeballs. We women were too restless that day to stay alone in our houses. Each went to seek some neighbor for reassurance, and as we walked we leaned against the wind like ghosts. Tarpaper ripped from roofs whirled past our windows. Sheds were overturned. Paths and doorways were blocked by fallen trees. Before it died at evening the wind cut a wide swath of destruction across mountain and mesa.

When I next rode on the trail up the Guaje ridge northwest of Los Alamos I became for the first time in my life almost hopelessly lost. Trees lay scattered as though spilled from a giant matchbox. Great roots had been flung upward out of pits of earth. Picking my way through the ruined landscape I lost all sense of direction. My confused mare balked and trembled till at last I got off and led her. I knew that for the animal's sake, if not my own, I must not panic. I talked to her gently and turned from time to time to lay my hand on her sweating neck in reassurance. At the peak of despair I stumbled across a shattered root. Exposed in the gaping earth shone a black piece of carved obsidian. That unexpected pattern of symmetry could only have been formed by the hand of man. I picked it up and held it in my hand, an ancient spearhead, and suddenly felt that I was not alone. An age-old human instinct for finding order in the midst of chaos came to my rescue. In a few moments I found myself back on the homeward trail.
Early the next December—a year after Pearl Harbor to the day—the faculty and boys were called to the "Big House" after dinner for a special meeting. I had to stay at home. Not long before, I had bought some sage-green material to make new curtains for our living room. They were almost ready to be hung, so while I waited I measured and pleated the edges where the drapery hooks were to be inserted. Something was going on; I had no idea what. Men in military uniform had been coming and going among us since spring but their presence was never explained. Airplanes had continued to fly over.

The meeting did not last long yet it seemed hours before I heard footsteps running. A door slammed and my ten-year-old son who had been looking forward for years to becoming a Los Alamos student like his brothers, burst in the front door, ran past me to his room, and big as he was, threw himself down on his bed and began to cry. He was unable to explain what the matter was and I had to wait for my husband to come and tell me what he had known for weeks. The school would have to close.

At midterm in February the boys were to be sent home. At first the Government had requested that no explanation be given, but Mr. Connell insisted that he must have an official notice from the military authorities that this action was necessary for the war effort. A formal letter from Mr. Stimson was framed and hung outside the director's office and a copy of it went out in the letter to the parents.

Under the stimulus of crisis, the boys were put through the full year's course of study in the remaining weeks. The senior boys, among them our eldest son, received their diplomas and were allowed to enter the college of their choice. The younger boys transferred to other schools. At Christmas I moved with our youngest boy to Taos where my mother and my brother's family were then living. My husband and the older boys stayed on at Los Alamos until the term was ended.

Even before I left, bulldozers moved in, and other weird machines roared up and down digging ditches for the foundations of future buildings. Everything was conducted in an element of extreme haste and mystery. Civilian visitors were conducted on tours of inspection everywhere, even through our homes. One day I recog-
nized Dr. Ernest Lawrence, whom my husband and I had met one summer in California. He seemed strangely diffident when I questioned him about our mutual friends, and broke away as quickly as possible from my attempts at conversation.

Another afternoon I was introduced to a young-looking man by the name of Oppenheimer. Cowboy boots and all, he hurried in the front door and out the back, peering quickly into kitchen and bedrooms. I was impressed, even in that brief meeting, by his nervous energy and by the intensity of the blue eyes that seemed to take in everything at a glance, like a bird flying from branch to branch in a deep forest. I had no idea then who he was. Later my husband, who taught the sciences, math and chemistry and physics, told me that Oppenheimer was renowned for research into the structure of the atom. We both knew that Dr. Lawrence had developed the cyclotron at Berkeley and this lead us to suspect that the mysterious project for which our school had been taken over had something to do with atomic research. What this had to do with war I, at least, was too innocent to imagine. We were too impressed with the emphasis upon secrecy to mention the names of these men to anyone. Rumors of course blew back and forth like tumbleweeds in a high wind, especially among our friends in Santa Fe, and we played the game by inventing fabulous fairy tales about what the Army might be up to. Perhaps, we said, they might be planning a submarine base in the pond where the ducks swam, and a secret passage would connect it with the Rio Grande!

We played the game and hid the soreness in our hearts, going on with our own lives as best we could. My husband taught one year in a California school, but we could not be happy there among the unfamiliar seasons and in an academic life so conservative and different from the adventurous background we were used to. We moved back to New Mexico and my husband opened a school in Taos which was modeled as closely as possible upon Los Alamos. It was too much like trying to breathe life back into a dead body. The times had changed. The war was still upon us and no one could dream what new patterns might be emerging. At the end of a year he gave up the venture and tried one line of work after another so that we would not have to leave New Mexico.
THIRTEEN

THROUGH Edith Warner's years at the bridge the pressure of human life kept gnawing away at the isolation of the plateau. West of the bridge the road had been straightened and graded. A new road up the steep side of a cliff replaced the old one that used to wind through the canyon, crossing the stream more than twenty times on the way to Los Alamos. An improved road was built into the Valle Grande where only herders once wandered with their sheep in summer. In the autumn of 1941 railway crews began to tear up the tracks of the D. & R. G. narrow-gauge railroad. The little train we knew affectionately as the "chili line" would run no longer. The sound of busy trucks roaring over the bridge replaced the bright whistle of the engine. The road to Santa Fe had gone through several stages of improvement, and until the war the number of tourists who found their way to the tearoom at Otowi grew steadily greater.

During the first years of the war Edith had found it almost impossible to keep going. Gas rationing meant fewer visitors and more difficulty getting the supplies she needed. Should she put aside "selfish desires," she asked herself? Go back to the outside world and a war job?

In the midst of her confusion—this was late in 1942—she learned that the Los Alamos Ranch School was closing. A construction company moved in with all kinds of heavy equipment. A fence was thrown round several thousand acres on the plateau; the whole area was converted into an Army post and closely guarded.

The civilians who came to work at Los Alamos were also closely guarded and apparently never allowed to leave the mesa. But in the early spring of 1943 the civilian head of the project began com-
ing down once a week with his wife to Edith Warner’s house for dinner. Curiously enough he turned out to be a man she knew. Looking a little like the slim and wiry hero of a Western movie, in blue jeans and cowboy boots and spurs, he had stopped at the little house years ago at the beginning of a packtrip. Edith had given him tea and a slice of the magical chocolate cake that seemed to compel whoever tasted it to come back for more. This man too had come back. There was something about him that she liked. His senses were alert as some creature of the woods. He had a poet’s face, with eyes as blue as gentians and a mouth that was at the same time firm and a little wistful. She learned that he was a professor of physics at a California university.

He had known and loved the plateau since the summer of 1922 when he took a pack trip from Frijoles into the Valle Grande—this must have been only a short while before Edith came to stay in the canyon with the Boyds. Later he and his brother bought a ranch in the Pecos Valley, high on the east side of the mountains and returned many times for camping trips to the Pajarito country. It was in the summer of 1937 that he first stopped at Edith’s. In 1941 he brought his wife to meet her—like so many other young men who as boys had fallen under the spell of the little house and wanted to share it with those they loved.

It was not until 1945, after the atomic bombs had been exploded at Hiroshima and Nagasaki, that she could tell us this was Robert Oppenheimer.
It was he who had suggested Los Alamos to the Army as a possible site for the development of the bomb. It was the merest chance that he knew of the existence of such a place and that he had the intuitive mind to sense its possibilities.

"Ever since the discovery of nuclear fission, the possibility of powerful explosives based on it had been very much in my mind, as it had that of many other physicists," he admitted later. "We had some understanding of what this might do for us in the war and how much it might change the course of history."

They had some understanding too of what it might do against us. The race was against time, they believed. The knowledge that the Germans were experimenting with the military uses of atomic fission was the spark that ignited our own fierce effort.

This effort, as Oppenheimer tells us, had at first been scattered and fragmentary. Science has always depended upon the cooperation of many minds; in this perhaps lies its real hope for us all. Wartime restrictions were making intercommunication increasingly difficult. A central laboratory was needed where extreme secrecy somehow could be combined with the utmost freedom for men to share their experience with one another. Through Oppenheimer's acquaintance with the locale, Los Alamos was selected out of several relatively inaccessible areas in New Mexico as the one the Army believed most appropriate for the site of this laboratory. It was remote; housing already was available, and the setting was beautiful. This last was a factor that seemed important to Oppenheimer, for he knew the quality of the men whom he hoped to induce to work there, and was sure they would respond to surroundings that stretch and enrich the spirit.

Oppenheimer persuaded the military authorities to let small groups of men and women come down from "the Hill" for dinner at the little house by the river. Caught up as he now was in the whirlpool of war, the furious plans to construct a deadly weapon, the impossible and often agonizing decisions that must be weighed and implemented from day to day, and often from moment to moment, he never forgot that the heart must have its nourishment. He sensed that uprooted people had a particular need that these hours at Edith's house could fill. Perhaps from his own experience he knew
that those whose daily thoughts were involved with techniques of destruction would find healing for their divided spirits at the place where the river makes a noise.

The security regulations, as he himself has observed, were really fantastic. Families were supposed to come with their husbands if they wanted to, but they were not allowed to leave. Telephone calls were monitored. It was illegal to mail a letter except in the authorized drops and all incoming and outgoing mail was censored. Drivers' licenses were all made out under fictitious names. The post was guarded and the laboratory was guarded within the post. No wonder that through those years of tension there were many people at Los Alamos who felt that only those evenings at Edith Warner's kept them human.

One and sometimes two groups came down nearly every night. Places were often booked for weeks in advance. There even came to be a kind of rivalry between those who had regular places on the list, and those who were seldom able to get there.

The meals that Edith served were always simple: a stew flavored with herbs on big terra-cotta Mexican plates; posole, an Indian dish made of parched corn; lettuce in a black pottery bowl; fresh bread; a sweet tomato relish, watermelon pickle, spiced peaches or apricots; a dessert of raspberries. Tilano served and sometimes joked a little, his long braids swinging as he poured hot coffee into big pottery cups. Edith kept busy in the kitchen, moving swiftly and quietly between stove and table in her deerskin moccasins, managing everything without fuss or hurry, though she had worked since dawn, and dishwashing, with all the water heated in kettles on the stove, would go on long into the night. She knew that for most of her guests this was the only respite from the tension in which their days were spent. For her it was a war job beyond her wildest expectations.

What this time was like no one can tell better than she does in the third of her Christmas letters:

New Year's day of this historic 1945 held no hint of the atomic era. There were no blasts from the Pajarito Plateau making discord in the song of the chorus as I sat in the sun on an old portal at San Ildefonso. Teen, just past two, watched the dancers with me and
later demonstrated the steps of the little deer. The only indication of war was the absence of his father and the other young men.

During January I rested and learned to milk, but the pueblo prepared for San Ildefonso's feast day on the 23rd. It was the time for the ceremonial Buffalo dance, and once again I took Tilano over to the house where he and all the dancers make themselves ready. On the morning of the fourth day they went into the hill before dawn to await the haunting song of the chorus. I leaned against an old adobe house as the deep drum tones rolled and the song called the men who dance as godly animals. For hundreds of years a chorus has called and a line of women waited at the foot of the hill—waited to touch these men and take into themselves that intangible spiritual power sometimes attained by human beings. As the song reached its climax a long gray plumed serpent of smoke rose from the hilltop and spread over the pueblo. From between the hills came the leader, the hunters, the Buffalo lady and men. From over the hills came Deer and Antelope and Mountain Sheep. All came to the foot of the hill where the women waited to touch them, where the chorus waited to accompany them to the plaza with exultant song.

Tilano, who has always been a Deer, became the leader this year. Babies I had held were grown up enough to be Antelope and Sheep. Tomacita and Facundo were Buffalo, and their son slept in his cradle in the ceremonial house where they danced. These human bonds make contact for me, so that the snow falling softly and quietly on the earth, on deer antlers and buffalo manes and curved sheep horns, was significant.

Pruning was finished but the first peas had not been planted when Joe came to tell me that his father, Ignacio, had gone on his last journey to the hills. It was Ignacio who told me, "If, when we dance, our hearts are right, the rain will come." There were many memories as I watched the candles flicker at his side—memories of him and of the others who had preceded him. Just the month before, stooped and almost blind, he had served at the mass for Tonita. He had lived a long and full and active life. The moccasins beneath his blanket were well worn. He would have been unhappy sitting by the fire. I miss him as I shall miss Juan Estevan and Sayah, but I cannot mourn.
Summer was dry and hot—so hot. I searched in vain for Mariposa lilies in June, though in May the hills had been gay with flowers. The weeks seemed an endless round of gathering vegetables and preparing meals. There was tension and accelerated activity on the Hill with the men "going south." Explosions on the Plateau seemed to increase and then to cease. Men were in the Pacific, leaving wives on the Hill. Things—unknown things, were happening.

The climax came on that August day when the report of the atomic bomb flashed around the world. It seemed fitting that it was Kitty Oppenheimer who, coming for vegetables, brought the news. I had not known what was being done up there, though in the beginning I had suspected atomic research. Much was now explained. Now I can tell you that Conant and Compton came in through the kitchen door to eat ragout and chocolate cake; that Fermi and Allison, Teller, Parsons, came many times; that Oppenheimer was the man I knew in pre-war years and who made it possible for the Hill people to come down; that Hungarians, Swiss, Germans, Italians, Austrians, French and English have been serious and gay around the candlelit table. It has been an incredible experience for a woman who chose to live in a supposedly isolated spot. In no other place could I have had the privilege of knowing Neils Bohr who is not only a great scientist but a great man. In no other way could I have seen develop a group feeling of responsibility for presenting the facts to the people and urging the only wise course—international control of atomic energy and the bomb.

Perhaps the desperate state of the world and the anguish of millions as the constant backdrop of life intensified the joys that fall always brings. This year there were trips to the Plateau for wood on days when sky and aspen vied with each other in beauty. The wind made melody in tall pines while I gathered pine knots. They seemed to be the essence of the elements garnered by a tree and now released in the fireplace to complete the cycle. Their gathering has become as much a part of the fall ceremonies as the garden harvesting and the southward flight of geese. The rhythmic order of nature holds for me assurance as well as beauty.
FOURTEEN

AFTER THE WAR, atomic research continued and the city of Los Alamos kept on growing till it was a blaze of light under the night sky, and the old bridge across the Rio Grande was no longer adequate for the increasing flow of traffic. Supplies and building materials for the city, and heavy equipment for the laboratories, were brought in by motor truck. The narrow-gauge railway had been abandoned, its tracks pulled up. Workers by the hundreds from the pueblos and the Spanish-American villages along the river and from as far away as Santa Fe commuted daily. By Christmas of 1946, Edith Warner learned that the plans for the new bridge would bring the world into her dooryard, almost beneath her kitchen window. With the constant roar of heavy trucks her cherished peace and seclusion would no longer be possible. Life in the little house would not even be endurable. There was nothing to do but move.

Tilano at first refused to leave. He was around eighty now, and set on living out his years at the place-where-the-river-makes-a-noise. How can a man, when he is old, tear out his roots from the soil made of the fallen leaves of his long years? Edith was fifty-four, unaware that she had only five more years of life. Her one concern was to find a place where Tilano could live out his years happily. “Without him” she said, “the twenty years at the bridge would have been impossible.” He had become her companion and helpmate, and the living bond with the earth into which her roots had gone so deep. “For many the little house at the river was a landmark, for some an experience. For me it was two decades of living and learning,” Edith said in her letter of 1947.
With the instinct of a bird to rebuild its nest, a spider to re-spin the torn web, she kept on searching until she found a place that would suit Tilano. It was about half a mile away, up the canyon and opposite the garden on the other side of the arroyo which enters the Rio Grande just south of the bridge. The site was withdrawn, secluded, screened from the highway by spice bushes and juniper and a tall grove of cottonwood. The river could be heard only on occasional very still days. They would no longer be able to see the Black Mesa which had seemed the immovable point around which the tides of color in the valley shifted. Instead the arm of To-tavi came close around them, the tawny-rose slope of river gravel capped by a miniature palisade of black basaltic rock. Over the bare shoulder of the mesa a trail led upward into the world of bare rock and secret hidden springs. The animal world seemed closer than the world of humans.

Tilano agreed that the place had possibilities. The land belonged to the pueblo; in the slow Indian way it took four months for the council to decide that a house could be built here. These were months of tension, of heartache, and again the repeated discipline of patience. Over and over Edith found herself facing what reason said was impossible. And over and over solutions came in the most unexpected manner, and at last a demonstration of friendship and love that seemed like a miracle.

Looking back to those dry windy days when I was faced with building a house and a road, finding water, moving stable, corral and chicken houses, I am certain it was a miracle. I had only a few hundred dollars and some old lumber. But Tilano and I had friends, more than we knew. There were those who had found in the guest house rest for weary bodies and minds; those who had watched the morning light move across the mesas and been renewed.

No one knows who first thought of building the new house for Edith. The thought seemed to start spontaneously in many minds. Some gave interest and advice; some offered financial assistance; there were others, and they came from both sides of the river, from the centuries-old pueblo, and from the new city on the mesa, who
gave unstintingly of the strength of their hands and their hours of leisure.

In May of 1947, Tony Pena from the pueblo started to make adobe bricks in the garden, bricks out of earth where corn had grown the year before, earth and water and straw mixed together, shaped in wooden forms, dried in the brilliant sunlight to enduring hardness. Tilano had decided the exact spot where the house would stand and had marked the outline of the foundations. On the last week end in the month Facundo and Sandy, Tony and Juanita came over from San Ildefonso in their wagons. There was no road yet; everything must be hauled across the sandy arroyo that often ran with unpredictable water. The foundations of the house—long trenches filled with stones—were laid out in the rain. Tony and Tilano looked happy and said it was good. The rain was an assurance that prayers were potent, that the hearts of the builders were right.

About fifteen people from Los Alamos had asked to help, young physicists with their wives, men who had participated in the birth of the atomic bomb, women who had shared the long months of tension before the test explosion. Now they began to work side by side with the men and women from San Ildefonso. The men hauled rocks in the creaking wagons; women fitted them into the trenches and mixed mud. Children played in the arroyo where Tilano had dug holes for them in the sand and uncovered hidden water.

This was a good day; it was the beginning of many days that had in them all the quality an Indian thinks of when he says that rain
is "good" or that a man's heart is "good." They were days of hard work, week end after week end in the hot summer sun, exhausting physical effort, unaccustomed muscles that had to be held under the discipline of mind and will till they learned the function which to the pueblo men and women came as naturally as breathing. Pine saplings had to be peeled with backbreaking motions and aching, blistered hands. There were floors to be laid, one of brick, the others of adobe; there were oceans of mud to be mixed and carried for plastering.

Tilano and Tony bossed the physicists. Frustrated scientists sometimes suggested more efficient methods, but efficiency never became much of a consideration. The Indians had a know-how that was built into the fibers of their nerves and muscles. "This is the way we do it," they would say, always without hesitation, the eye noting more accurately than any measure whenever an angle was out of line, whenever a curve had become unbalanced. Women down on their hands and knees smoothing a floor would smile and try again, when Tilano with a grandfatherly tolerance would say, "No, not that way, this way."

"Sometimes we felt that during the week the Indians would undo our work and do it over again," one scientist said ruefully, learned as he was in all the intricacies of atomic motion.

Walls rose with amazing speed. No Ph.D. or his wife was ever allowed to set one brick on another; they carried the adobes and handed them, obedient as children helping father, to Tony who laid each carefully in its place. Over the walls the vigas were lifted and rested, old beams from the pueblo, new straight logs from the forests above Truchas and beyond Puye. On top of the vigas the peeled pine saplings were laid. These were covered with roofing paper and mud and more paper, then tar, and then more dirt, a good roof, upheld by the good hearts of those who had helped build it.

"When it was time to cover the walls with plaster, first rough, then smooth," Edith told us, "the Pueblo people sent word they wanted to do it. The men mixed the mud and carried it to the women. Some kneaded it and handed it to those who with skilled hands covered the adobe bricks. There was much talk and laughter and always a beautiful rainbow motion of the hand."
At lunch every one relaxed under the cottonwoods in the meadow. A simple meal was served—ragout, homemade bread, garden lettuce, big slabs of chocolate cake. Tilano leaned against an old tree. His face was lined, but these were lines made by a lifetime of wind and sunlight, of laughter and tenderness. It was a happy face, as though the winds that had touched his life had all been gentle ones. He seemed like the tree he leaned against, whose leaves move in the slightest wind, but whose roots hold firmly.

“When Tilano lights the little fire on Christmas Eve,” Edith says in her letter of December 1947, “those to whom it pays respect will know that human beings now live where last winter only quail, rabbits and coyote made patterns in the snow.”
T

HE FIRST WINTER in the new house was a hard one. Edith could not help being homesick at first for the little house that had meant for her "two decades of living and learning."

"The blue heron has not followed us from the river to the side of To-tavi-kadi, mesa of the quail," she wrote us. "I miss hearing him as he flew homeward after his late supper; miss seeing him standing on one leg in the lagoon as he waited for a minnow to swim across his image here on a still night. . . .

"In January a succession of storms piled snow on snow. The snow and the wood kept us busy. Each trip to the woodpile or the chicken yard was into a world where white mesas glistened against a deep blue sky, where snow-covered trees shook starry flakes from their branches. From the wide window near the fireplace we saw storm clouds gather over the mountains, or sunset turn the peaks bright red."

It was the winter that Donicio died, he who had been the center in a line of dancers. The chorus grouped itself around him for the Corn Dance; the song seemed to come from him. The feeling of loss weighed upon Edith's heart, though she knew that soon the dance would group itself around another center.

The house still seemed very new. It had not yet begun to blend with the earth from which it had been made, yet already when the first geese flew south they had discovered it. They flew north again early in February. Her new life began to be woven once more into the rhythm of the seasons. The stormy winter had brought a wealth of blossom to the stony hillside. By the well she watched a bud unfold upon a slender stalk, wondering if she had dreamed the exquisite cream-colored Mariposa lily, three-petalled, with its center
of bright gold. She had seen them bloom before only on the high mesa west of the river. How patiently the seeds must have waited through the long dry years for the moisture to waken them.

Summer brought guests again. The garden yielded its abundance. On the new window ledge the pots of mint and chives grew green among the scarlet blossoms of geranium. Children came down to play under the cottonwoods in the arroyo bottom. Old Los Alamos boys brought wives and babies for a taste of chocolate cake. Scientists left for far parts of the world, hoping someday to return.

“This is a changing world,” Edith wrote us. “Perhaps what they really want is to find the essence unchanged. This becomes my challenge.”

In September she made a feast for the pueblo. About a hundred came in cars and wagons to see the new house and to have dinner. This too was a link between the old life and the new. In the first days of the adobe guest house, the whole village had come over one evening for a housewarming. The children had been put to sleep after supper in the small bedroom. In the living room they had danced to the sound of the drum and Indian voices singing. At the end of the dance one of the men had put a turquoise necklace around Edith’s neck; María presented her with a small carved wooden santo.

In the ten years since the guest-house party, much had changed. Many of the Pueblo boys who danced that other evening had been to war, some in France, some in England, some in the Pacific. Now they were back in their own sacred world, but never again would the mountains of the four directions be the limits of that world. The war was over but peace had not yet been secured. “The scientists know that they cannot go back to their laboratories leaving atomic energy in the hands of the armed forces and the statesmen,” Edith wrote us. “Nor can I concern myself only with my kitchen, for I too am one of the people.”

Once someone asked her if it were true that the Pueblos had developed a way of life that protected them from the frustrations and tensions which the white world seemed to be facing. She smiled. “These people are human beings like ourselves,” she told him, “with their own full share of human good and ill.”
She resisted the temptation that many white people feel to idealize the Indians, the effort to find in this ancient culture all that seems lacking in our own. In the same way she realized how the younger Indians, resisting the bondage of their own tradition, look to the white man’s way as an escape. How well she understood that neither way can be completely fulfilled without the other. The two forms of knowledge, the two patterns of living, must somehow fertilize each other so that the gods may live their great polarities in human hearts as well as in all nature. The knowledge that leads to power, and the wisdom that grows from the service of the earth and the love of its beauty existed side by side for her, as though they were the opposite banks between which the great river flowed.

After this last “feast” Edith decided that it was more satisfactory to invite her Indian neighbors to visit her a family at a time. Tomacita and Facundo who had danced as Buffalo three years before, celebrated their tenth wedding anniversary with her. The small son, Nahn-tu, who had slept in his cradle in the ceremonial house during the dance, now shared his place with a long-lashed baby sister. Teen, who at two had watched the dance with Edith, was now a schoolboy.

In the fall there were trips to the mesa for wood and to gather pine knots, “those multi-shaped legacies of forgotten trees.” Many of the old roads were fenced, but Navawi’i, where John Boyd had first showed her the hollowed deer pit, was still accessible. In the midst of the Plateau now dominated by Los Alamos the Government had set aside a “sacred area” where the San Ildefonso people were still allowed to tend their ancient shrines and perform the ceremonies that insured the earth’s fertility. Aspen still flamed in gold up the sides of the Jemez Mountains. Turkey still called in the deep canyons, and the sunlight was warm and mixed with the scent of dried grass and juniper. Near a tumbled ruin she found a trail worn deep in the rock and a woman’s thumb print still visible on a sherd of her pottery.

“There alone in the sunlight,” she said, “I began to understand that nothing men may do, not even the atomic bomb, can in anyway touch or change the essence of this country.”
TWO YEARS of sun and snow weathered the new house and rooted it deeply in the side of the sheltering mesa. Slowly Edith began to feel the new spirit grow. The design became clear again, as though a new fabric were being woven from the raveled strands of the old. While Edith had wanted the house in the beginning especially for Tilano, it seemed essential that it have meaning for others.

How was it possible to develop quickly that which at the old house had grown slowly and unplanned over a long period of years? How could it be shared when no commercial reason drew people? For these problems there was no established method. It was not a picture to be painted, a poem to be written. It was not even mine to create. So I lived each day as it presented itself and hoped I would find the way. . . . Perhaps I can make you see now how the growing spirit of this house is compounded of the earth itself and the seasons, of daily living, and in great measure of the people who came to it.

When I go to feed the chickens each morning my eyes make the circle of the compass, beginning with the basaltic point of To-tavi in the west. Memory supplies its long line above the river, the quiet place on its side where I go to be alone, a tiny crescent ruin covered with dry grasses that shine in the sun, and across the river, the carved face of Shumo whose northern point is visible. Beyond the valley rise the mountains with Lake Peak sharply outlined against the sky, and in the north T’omo, like a great outstretched prehistoric creature above the road to Los Alamos. These deeply rooted steadfast.
mesas provide a bulwark for living in this age, and at the same time present beauty ever changing in color and aspect. On their sides and high places are ceremonial trails and shrines where for centuries men have placed prayer plumes when their hearts were right. Closer and more intimate is the hillside with its old trail, where I have found stones carried long ago in a buckskin pouch. From it the quail come down near the house, and a rabbit nibbles the grass unafraid. Above it the crescent winter moon shines, and this month Venus is the evening star.

I am glad the first winter was one of storm and cold because it necessitated spending many more hours indoors. Tilano's room, with its fireplace and sunlight on clear days quickly becomes the lived-in center of the house. Here hang his dance costume—buckskin leggings, fox-skin, bells, and the pictures of the children who call him uncle. Here feathers are sorted and tied with care for the dancers; a headdress or bow and arrows are made for some child; and from his chair he watches in unceasing wonder the cars going to and from Los Alamos. Sometimes there are guests for tea, as color follows color from foothills to sky. Sometimes on winter evenings there are tales of long ago. From here he went, when it was time to prepare for the Buffalo dance, to the pueblo, and returned with the quality of those days spent apart still on him.

I wish you might see the big kitchen on some Sundays, on Thanksgiving, during Christmas week, on many a day throughout the years. Sometimes it is little blond children, sometimes black-haired children who run into the kitchen for a drink of water or a basket of toys. . . . A car may come from Santa Fe, or from the Hill, or across the valley with someone who needs to sit awhile here and look at the mountains or the hillside. Rosanita came to celebrate her graduation as a nurse, Louis and Juanita their wedding anniversary. Hagi, who used to help in the garden as a little boy, and who hauled all the water for the house-building, came with his parents after graduation to discuss his future. Several months later he returned in a Marine uniform to "tell us all about it." Peter and Earle bring weeks of merriment and talk. All year our friends and friends of theirs drive across the arroyo to see how we fare, to look at the mountains, to add a bit of themselves to the spirit of the house.
Nineteen-fifty was a year of drought and heartbreak. Edith told us how she napped in the sun on January twenty-third, the day of San Ildefonso's winter feast when one usually huddles to watch the ceremony wrapped in blankets. On Easter Day the wind blew stinging sand on the naked bodies and the horned heads of the Buffalo dancers. Fruit blossoms blackened with frost in May. Water flowed in a thin discouraging trickle in the irrigation ditches. In June the corn and beans dried under a cloudless sky. In July thunderstorms, brief and violent, washed out the road and filled the garden with gravel. Late in September a hailstorm washed the mud plaster off the housewalls. After that no rain fell at all. Late carrots had to be dug from the ground with a pick.

Edith found herself thinking often of the prehistoric people who centuries ago, after long drought, had abandoned their pueblos to the slow work of ruin while they journeyed to the south in hope of greener fields. "They too must have scanned the sky with dwindling hope and finally with despair before they decided to leave their homes and sacred places," wondering if their ceremonies had lost the power to bring the rain.

Now on the high plateau where lizards scuttled among the bushes that grew thick in the roofless kivas, mankind was experimenting with another kind of power. It had been so far a power of death rather than of life. She thought of the thousands of homeless at Hiroshima and Nagasaki. How strange it seemed that the bomb which had created such waste and such suffering had been made on the plateau where the ancient people for so long invoked their gods in beauty. In the smallest atoms of dust the forces that hold the worlds together lay slumbering. Long ago men had learned to call them forth with prayer, with the prayer of dancing bodies, of soaring voices, making themselves one with the need of earth for rain. "If our hearts are right the rain will come," Ignacio had said. Had men forgotten the wisdom of the heart, the knowledge that all men everywhere are of one substance?

She remembered how the candlelight had shone upon the sensitive faces of the scientists in the little house by the river. How gaily these men had talked of their children, of mountain climbing and of music. It was hard to believe they had been working day and
night to split the atom and release its energy for the use of man, the violent use of man. In the days after Hiroshima she had seen many of these men recoil at the implications of what they had done. She had seen the realization grow among them that now irrevocably the world was one. As the community of knowledge had led to the discovery of atomic fission so now it must lead men to deal with the great power that had been unleashed: There were no frontiers left, behind which one could live blindly.

"We know," Robert Oppenheimer has said, "how little of the deep new knowledge which has altered the face of the world, which has changed—and increasingly and ever more profoundly must change—man's views of the world, resulted from the quest for practical ends or an interest in exercising the power that knowledge gives. For most of us, in most of those moments when we were most free of corruption, it has been the beauty of the world of nature and the strange and compelling harmony of its order, that has sustained, inspired, and led us."

The beauty of the world of nature—in spite of all the threat and hardship that was woven into life she could not doubt it. The energy in the atom—was it really different from that which slept in the waiting seed, in the sunlight released from blazing pine knots, in the stone that pulsed under the fingers that touched it rightly, in the hearts of those who worked together to rebuild what had been destroyed?

"How to endure the man-made devastating period in which we live and which seems almost as hopeless to control as drought; how to proceed when leadership seems utterly lacking, when individuals and nations seem stupid and arrogant; these are questions no human can answer," she told us. "I only know that the power recognized by those other sky-scanners still exists, that contact is possible. I know, too, what depths of kindness and selflessness still exist in my fellow-men. . . . When Tilano lights the Christmas Eve fire, perhaps against a white hillside, I shall watch from the house where some have felt peace, and hope that in your sky are some bright stars."
"ON GRAY DAYS like this," Edith wrote in one of her early days by the bridge, "I often think of the wild geese flying south. I heard their honking one October day and went out into the gently falling rain to see the swaying black line of them against the gray sky. Soon they entered the canyon and I watched them closely, following against the dark mesa the darker line. Now above, now below the broken mesa rim they flew with never a moment of hesitation, with always the memory of warm, plentiful feeding grounds, and an old trail leading to them. Where the river turns again, they rose above the mesa, and my last glimpse of them was that swaying line against the lighter clouds, winging southward. Death could be like that."

It was late in November of 1950. We were involved in war again. This time in Korea. I and my son, who was soon to enter the Army, drove down from Taos to spend a last afternoon with Edith and Tilano. It was a day as beautiful and warm as summer. We sat in the sunshine outside the kitchen door in the crisp scent of juniper, talking lightly and throwing sticks for the little dog to fetch. Tilano told us of the fox he had seen run down the mesa point only a little above the house, and of the deer tracks in the bushes near the garden. Age sits lightly on the men of the Pueblos and it was hard to realize that he was nearly eighty. His long hair in its braids was as black as ever. His eyes were still bright as a bird’s. The child and the wise old man were balanced in him.

Edith seemed frail; some digestive trouble had been plaguing her, but she laid it to the strenuous year, the constant anxiety over the strange weather, the struggles with the garden. "Rest and diet
are bound to bring me back to normal and mesa-climbing soon,” she told us smiling. She was fifty-eight that year. Her thin hair was quite white, and her eyes behind the wide-rimmed glasses were the untroubled color of spring water. How could I ever have thought her a nonentity, I wondered, remembering that early summer when she had wandered in from the forest above Anchor Ranch with her hands full of wildflowers and I had pigeonholed her as just another sentimental tenderfoot?

Now I was the mother of three grownup sons. My youngest—the boy who had wept over the closing of Los Alamos—was recovering from polio. My eldest son was married and I had a grandson. The second boy, whose feet Tilano is washing in the childhood picture, was a young man sitting here beside me. Edith was giving him her woman’s blessing as she had given it to so many brown-skinned Pueblo boys whose time had come to go to far-off wars. She gave it wordlessly as always, the cup of tea, the slice of chocolate cake, the peace and quietness of the autumn afternoon. Little did I dream in that moment that all three of my sons would find their lifework in fields connected with atomic energy. The eldest was already an electronics engineer; his brother was to follow him. The youngest went safely enough I thought, into meteorology, but he, too, has taken part in atomic tests in Nevada and at Eniwetok. I suppose no generation has grown up to live in a world so changed from that of their own childhood. Los Alamos has become a city of thirteen thousand and our life on the mesa seems like a chapter in ancient history.
As usual that afternoon I complained to Edith about the complexities of my life and as usual she was all gentle sympathy. I was still bitter at having been exiled from the Plateau. The roots of my childhood and of my young womanhood were deep there. I never drove past the forbidding fences without tears in my eyes, and my hatred of the new city of Los Alamos was still sore. I had not learned, even from Edith, that out of the death of the old, life is continually being reborn. I had not yet realized that the gods of cloud and mountain move within us, or that the center of the sacred world is in ourselves.

Edith surprised me that afternoon by speaking eagerly of a power-line that might soon be built near enough to the house that she could have electricity. She too, I thought resentfully, was willing to abandon the past, the magic of the simple life that had been hers, for the doubtful blessing of "modern conveniences."

"Tilano is too old to keep hauling water from the well," she told me. "If we could have a pump he could live out his days in peace." I knew then that it was no longer possible to go on dreaming that one could live in a house by the side of the road and not be part of the changing life that goes on flowing past it.

In January of 1951 I learned with dismay that Edith had gone to Chicago to have an operation. When the surgeons found they could do nothing for her, they allowed her to return home. They did not tell her that the situation was hopeless, but I am sure she knew. We who loved her fought against the knowledge as long as we could. She had been home only a week when her condition became suddenly critical. More for our sakes than her own, and most especially because of Tilano, she allowed herself to be taken to the very modern hospital at Los Alamos. There was a new treatment with radioactive gold which some dared hope might cure her. For a few weeks she seemed to be getting better, and we held our breaths. It would have seemed like the greatest of miracles if Los Alamos which had given us the bomb could also have given us her life. But in March a letter came from her neighbor, Ethel Frohman:

"Edith is at home and has decided to try nothing more. . . . Intellectually she is right, perhaps, but it is hard to understand. . . . We felt Edith just couldn't give up. . . . I guess the cancer
is so widespread that no one could hold out hope of any treatment doing any real good, and she is unwilling to go through any more just to be kept alive. Do write to her. She has told me how words as you can use them mean so much to her. . . . She is wonderful so far, worrying about my daughter Kay’s stubbornly fixed baby, and Grandpa, and having Tilano give me their supply of milkfilters. Makes you wonder if you’d have strength yourself to be so calm, or would you just give way to hysterics? She’s a wonderful person.”

I was sure that for Edith it wasn’t giving up, only an acknowledgment of where the trail was leading, and the determination to follow it, as the wild geese that rise at their autumn summons. In her fifth year by the river she had written in her journal:

_When I had a tooth extracted a few days ago I was very calm. As I sat in the chair I saw inwardly my mesas. From thought of them strength and calm seemed to come to me. I became tense at times, but as I thought of the mesas I relaxed. It was not that the fear ceased to exist, and then the pain, but that another thought was greater than me. That must explain what my Indian friend once said. She had felt a fear once that I did, but she said, “I am strong in my heart.” Surely that is better than saying there is no fear, no pain._

It was the end of March when she went home for the last time; it was the time of wind and blowing dust, days like those when Chai used to cross the bridge to sit with her when she was alone by the river. She went home to the embrace of the mesas, to Tilano’s gentle and unperturbed companionship, his strength and his belief in life’s goodness that never faltered. A practical nurse was found to take care of her, a woman with quiet and capable ways, a little like an old-time mountain midwife. Her sister and her goddaughter came to be with her. I drove down to sit with them one afternoon when Edith was sleeping. The spring sunshine was warm around us. The sky was very blue. A few clouds made purple shadows on the mesas. The tips of the cottonwood leaves were beginning to unfold from the tight sheaths of their winter buds. I felt as though we were
waiting for a birth as much as for a death, as though the passage from life were not after all so different from the passage into it, as though Edith's spirit were only in labor to be free, like a child that must be delivered from its mother. Why have men made such an enemy of death, I began to wonder? Edith was wiser, who saw it only as a transition and went her way without struggle.

She made herself ready as though she were going on a journey. Books she had borrowed she made sure would be returned. Small items of daily life, like the milk filters she no longer would needing, she passed on to others. From the mail-order catalogue she selected a two-year supply of blue jeans for Tilano, as though she realized just how much time there would be before he followed her. Knowing there would not be another Christmas she wrote us a last letter:

After weeks in a hospital it is especially wonderful to be here in Tilano's room. Here he can rub my arm to relax me and give me of his calm and strength. From the bed I can see the first light on the mountains, watch the snow clouds rise from the glistening Truchas peaks, follow the sunset color from the valley to the sky. I can feel the mesas even though I do not see them. It is a good place in which to wait for the passing from a rich, full life into whatever work lies beyond. Since I cannot be well to take care of Tilano, I am happy and at peace. I would have you think of me that way.

When I saw her last the flame of her life shone from her eyes like a candle lighted against the darkness of a window. On a buckskin thong at her throat she was wearing her talisman, a small river pebble, smooth and polished and yellow as old ivory. It seemed to me that everything superfluous had been stripped from her and that at the four corners of the sacred world the gods stood waiting. She died on the fourth of May in 1951, in the opening of the young leaves, when the Mariposa lilies on the mesa begin to push the dark weight of earth aside and reach toward the sunlight.

During one of those last weeks I dreamed that I went again to Edith's house. There were crowds of people tiring her with their
chatter. Then, in my dream, I saw the Indians, I saw Tilano’s people, coming out of the pueblo fully costumed for the Buffalo Dance, dark-skinned against the pale desert background, bearing in their hands green boughs, symbols of undying life. It wasn’t the season for the Buffalo Dance; in my dream I knew this. They were doing it especially for Edith. They were dancing to impart energy to the earth upon which she dwelt, to make it holy for her. And in my dream I knew that I must go away and leave her to them.

The University of New Mexico Press announces that The House at Otowi Bridge is to be published as a book during the forthcoming season. The bound volume will have additional material besides that published in the Quarterly, including further selections from Edith Warner’s Christmas letters, and the recipe for the famous chocolate cake.