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Accents of the West

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Accents of the West

By HARVENA CONRAD RICHTER

I like the stronger accents of the West.
The heart that shrinks at first from desert waste
Soon learns the joy of rare, new wines to taste.
And last of all it loves this country best.

Rio Grande

Wild ducks on sunburnt water,
Treacherous, ever-flowing silt
On which the careless afterglow has spilt
Its dregs of wine.
Westward, the sand hills draw
Their barren dunes toward Acoma.
But down here by the river's edge is Life.
Brown-banked acequias flow and branch
To many a secluded river ranch.
And red-wings cry with western bravado.
Eastward, the mountains toss with sterile strife,
But down here by the Rio Grande is Life—
Young red willows, rushes—cottonwoods
With spreading arms their spangles cast
Over the water as it ripples past.

Placita

Warm, caressing sunlight falls
Across the brown adobe walls.
Here the tempo of life is slow.
Tongues of chile burn and glow.

Black-eyed children play in the heat,
Burros bray in a twisting street,
Mexican cattle, red as rust,
Wander home in their golden dust.

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Who can say here what is dross?
An Indian church with a wooden cross
O'erlooks the village, sending down
Its benediction on the town.

Sheep Herder

His sharp, peaked tent is white against the hill,
Tethered on the canyon's rugged floor.

His dog

Runs far afield for squirrels.

Under the piñons close at hand

His sheep with drowsy patience

Raise their plaint.

The minor tones, from ewe, from lamb,

Are carried on the evening air.

A simple herder. He knows best his way

Among the cedars of the cone-shaped hills.

Ceniza,

rabbit bush,

and spicy sage

He brews for tea. His life is laid on simple lines,

His earthy grave among the pungent pines.

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