



*We like the Indian country, where Navajos often were our friendly neighbors.*

told them about Indians up north and down in Mexico. They told us about school in Santa Fe and about a very smart medicine man in Toadlena. We also learned that a Fire dance would start in three days. We had always wanted to see this dance—the most spectacular of all Navajo dances.

Early the next morning I felt rather than heard someone at the door. I turned and saw a tiny young Navajo woman dressed in an orange velvet blouse and a wide green satin skirt. There are few beautiful Navajo girls, but here was one of them. The proud way she held her head. Her deep brown eyes serious, yet ready to laugh. She reminded me of what the Navajos sing, "I walk in beauty . . ." She seemed to do just that.

"Come in," I invited. We looked at each other and smiled. Suddenly

it seemed as though Charlotte and I had known each other for a long time.

"My husband told me to come see you," she said. "He was here last night."

Our talk was woman-talk. Clothes and recipes and a bit of gossip about old Pumpkin Top's young wife. Charlotte felt better in Navajo clothes. "You can't sit on the ground in a white woman's dress," she said. "And when you wear a blanket, you don't need a coat and a hat."

She told me how she preserved cactus fruits and made jams from desert berries. She told me about the herbs she gathered for seasoning mutton stew and how to make that strange Navajo bread—*nun-es-ka-day*. Then we talked of the Fire dance. It was being held a few miles beyond Window Rock.

"Get there when the sun sets," she

said. "That is the time the medicine men make the big corral."

We were at the dance ground much earlier. We knew there would be much to see. We watched the medicine men sprinkle corn meal in a wide circle around a huge pile of logs. Then young Navajos seized fresh pinyon boughs from a nearby stack and laid them four feet high on the corn meal circle. Quickly the great enclosure was finished. Hundreds of Indians quietly moved in. With blankets and coffee pots each family picked a spot to build a fire and spend the night.

We shared our fire with Charlotte and her husband and watched the dozens of other little fires busily cooking Indian suppers. You could smell mutton sizzling and coffee boiling and green corn roasting. You had a feeling of comfort and abundance here in this spectacle of ceremony and color. At last the Navajos lit the log pile. The naked white-painted dancers began their weird all-night ritual.

At daylight we went back to the trailer sleepy and dusty and full of bewildered wonder at what we had seen. After the Fire dance my husband needed a ghost town setting for a piece of fiction he was writing. So we headed for Coal Basin.

But first we stopped in Gallup to get ice, non-perishable groceries and to fill the trailer's built-in water tank and the extra 10-gallon water cans. We carry these cans for additional water when campsites aren't near wells or springs. We also find these containers convenient for hauling and heating water for baths. Since story interest in the locale comes first with us, we make camp at an interesting spot, regardless of modern comforts. We drive out from it to further see and enjoy the desert.

We don't mind what might seem inconveniences for we can adjust ourselves to most situations. What if we do have to heat the bath water in those ten-gallon cans on the Coleman range? There's a bath tub built in under one of the dinette seats that in other times serves as a storage space for bedding. That range heats the trailer, too. An extra heating unit would mean extra weight.

We do without electricity and use kerosene lamps. We like the small, squat type because it doesn't tip easily. Most portable light plants are too heavy for rugged trailer travel. Keeping the load's weight down is important for desert travel. We carry only a few well-chosen, wrinkle-proof clothes. We have only a few housekeeping utensils, but those are used for many purposes. I use a medium-sized wire strainer for a flour sifter, colander and