# *traveler in the* WILDERNESS

*by Cid Ricketts Sumner*

selections here have a woman's touch — much is really said so well.



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self and other people a ticklish business. So I had evolved my little theory that age should hold not only contemplation but danger, adventure. And I do believe in theories. Right or wrong they provide a slight stay against the confusions of existence.

At the moment when I read the ad, I had furthermore the feeling that I needed to withdraw and consider, that somehow I should renew a sense of wonder at the world around me, achieve a fresh kinship with the old elementals of earth and air and sky and water to which in the natural course of events I would before too many years be returned; that I would like to be reduced, by hardship and danger if need be, to my own essential parts, perhaps even created anew.

There were also more intimate and personal reasons for wanting to get away, for when one meets with a situation which no human power may remedy, when there is nothing to do about it, then surely is the moment to plunge into activity so great that there is no time for thought or grieving. But the obvious truth is that, since I was now in my sixties, I was at that period of life when one is too young for the chimney corner, too old to be at the center of things, is rather poised on the periphery ready to take off at any tangent that promises distraction, excitement, fun. And on the latter, youth has no monopoly. That is one of the pleasant surprises of age.

So I was ripe to rise to such bait as the ad offered. I marked it with a black penciled circle and laid it in my desk drawer, less with any idea of actually following it up than from fear that some child or grandchild might come upon it, think me in my dotage for even noting such a wild expedition and take steps toward confining me in an institution. The third day, April 27, I wrote what used to be a penny postal: "Dear Mr. Eggert, Please send information about your excursion—cost, equipment, lodging en route etc. How rugged must one be? I am not very. I am old but intrepid. Yours truly etc."

That *intrepid* was a bare-faced lie. I am often scared to death.

for my comfort. Had I had lunch? Well, come along and at least have a cup of coffee and keep him company while he had his. Would I like to drive out to the Dinosaur National Monument? Yes, I'd like to, I said, and then having gotten the word only by ear and not being as familiar with it as I later became, I said, "What? Is there really a national monument to Dinah Shore?"

That drive was my introduction not only to the hospitality of the Park Service people, here represented by the Robinsons, but to the awful sight of my first canyon. We stopped by the roadside not far from where the earth seemed to fall away into nothingness. Charles went ahead to stand on the very brink, outlined against vacancy, his close-cropped hair gold in the sunlight. "We'll be coming along here in about a week," he said. I took one hasty look and stepped back. I simply could not look. It was too much for me. My eyes refused to see, my mind to comprehend, and my memory of that gorge is even now as vague and blurry as an over-exposed film. I could not get back to the car fast enough. It was quite a little while before I got back my breath.

But I was not yet through with this preview of what lay ahead. Charles was following a narrow road that led right down into the canyon—one of the rare places where such an entrance is possible. I had not the courage to say, "No, no, I cannot bear any more of this." Sometimes it takes courage to be cowardly. The walls grew higher and higher as we descended. I could feel them bearing in upon me. When we reached the very bottom, we got out of the car and I stood on a spit of sand between a cave and the noisy tumbling river, arms folded tight across my breast to keep my heart in it. The river itself did not dismay me; I am accustomed to sailing in a small boat in rough water. But the canyon! Digging into the sand with my toes, I forced my gaze upward to where the sky, no longer a familiar sheltering dome, lay like a jagged blue lid clamped across the top of the canyon

This time, on the very edge of the world, I was able to look, to see the gorge that was a mile wide here; and fifteen hundred feet down, the little pea-soup river that had made the big canyon. I even noted below us far to the left a cathedral-like formation of rock and said, "I'll watch for that as we come along the river." The sun was lower now, the opposite side was in shadow, the red rock purpling there; the cedars that topped it were black. Far away on the horizon a mountain peak held a drift of snow that shone like a fallen white sun. I moved to the very edge and peered over. There was no downward slope visible, only a ledge some five hundred feet below. The rock we stood on, flat as a table here, was hollowed out, concave, and that last crevasse we had jumped across needed to widen but a little more to send this great hunk of wall crashing downward.

In the face of immensity it may be that the mind, to preserve its sanity, seeks relief in something small and comprehensible. It was while we were standing there that I was struck by two things insignificant in themselves and worth remembering only because of the effect they had on me. One was a small bird, slight and swift, of the swallow family perhaps. It flew among the pines that stood behind us. Then, with the utmost daring, it went on, on, out over space. Of course I knew that the air was the same there as above solid ground, I knew it was quite unreasonable of me to feel such admiration. But later when I too, in an ancient shaky cub plane, was flying along the brink of an even deeper canyon and back and forth across it, I remembered that small bird and took courage.

The other thing that struck me was a nosegay of what looked to be ground phlox. It grew just over the edge of the gorge out of no more than a spoonful of soil lodged on solid rock, with not even a small crevice to support it. Pure white, all blossom, with no visible green. I pointed it out to Charles. He looked at me a moment, puzzled, then he nodded and took a picture of it. He was good at quick understanding.

Camp was awake when I got back, Don just turning a beautiful pancake which I snatched on the grounds that I had not had any for such a long time. It was delicious. We were late getting away that morning. Mr. Neilson came down to see us off, and two bearded men in scant shorts and nothing more appeared out of nowhere. They looked brown and gaunt and hungry, but breakfast was over, all our supplies stowed away in the *Brontosaur*. Perhaps they were only hungry for talk—or for uranium. They had a camp a few miles back in the hills, they said, and were prospecting. I did not talk with them but went and got in the boat, eager to be off. Only now, out in the sun and air, did I realize what a really rather dreadful little spot it was, back there in what I still think of as Hite where I had spent four days.

We were off at last; we rounded a bend and began to enter Glen Canyon. This is the longest of the canyons, the distance from Hite to Lee's Ferry, where it ends, being nearly 150 miles. The river was wide here with no rapids, but many cross-currents and whirls. Don in the small boat, towing us, kept moving from one side of the river to the other in order to avoid the back currents which looked almost as swift as the proper down-flowing one. Almost at once the buttes began to take on interesting shapes; great mounds were topped by formations that resembled ancient buildings. One, known as Castle Butte, over forty-four hundred feet above sea level, was an imposing sight, and yet not as castlelike as some others.

I heard more of Cataract now, from Charles and Tony, of how the rapids were almost continuous all one day, giving them no respite, of how the waves were sometimes as much as twelve or fifteen feet high. "Don't tell me any more," I said. "I can't bear it, that I missed all that." And yet, I thought, maybe it had not been a bad idea to let this group of men be off to themselves for a bit with no woman along. They would be freer, in deed, in speech. For last night for the first time on this trip I had heard a few damnits and oh hells, quickly hushed with an

This was a new and disturbing thought. What a pity, if we could not get through Marble Canyon and on down the Grand, which was to have been the cilmax of the trip. And yet, with 140 more miles to go through this benign and gentle Glen, maybe we would have had enough by the time we got to Lee's Ferry. "But surely," I said now, "surely when all those other rivers come in, there'll be plenty of water. There is the Escalante, the San Juan, Navaho Creek, the Paria"—for I had studied a map while I was waiting in my hot tin trailer—"and I don't know how many more."

"Could be," Charles said. "We'll read the gages as we go on down. The one at Lee's Ferry will tell us yes or no."

In the middle of the morning we stopped on the left bank and walked across an open field to where on the face of the cliff there were remains of an Indian dwelling. It was hot, crossing the field, and I followed the others slowly, my little plaid parasol of not much help, for the heat was reflected up from the almost bare earth as if the ground were breathing hot breaths, blowing them into my face. It was here in the middle of this bleak bare field that I almost stepped on a small green plant much like a potato plant, with a trumpet-shaped white blossom of exquisite purity. It was the sacred datura or moonflower, so Don told me later. But when I broke the stem the evil smell of it reminded me of the Jimson weed, a pest in Mississippi, and I remembered walking through a patch of it barefooted once on my way to the little stream back of our house that my father had named, for some unknown reason, the Ganymede. There is nothing like a smell for translating one to other scenes. But evil-smelling or no, it was a wonder, this pure white flower, blooming in such a place.

The Indian dwelling was a ruin. At each side of a concave place in the cliff, there were the remains of the two lateral walls, built up of small flat stones. We came upon some bits of broken pottery and Don found an arrowhead. I found some pieces

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of flint, but left them. Soon every trace of that life would have disappeared, I thought, as we came back across the field. Yet once here the Indians had defended themselves from their enemies, the women had cultivated this field over which we walked, children had played. Nothing lasted but the earth itself, and that, with the wind and water and blowing sand, was ever-changing. I felt as transient as a butterfly.

We stopped for lunch at a sandbar on the right bank where the canyon widened out into a wooded valley. On the opposite side was a sheer high cliff, curtained with streamers of dark blue and purple that hung down over its face, the marks left by small streams of water running across it. As soon as he had eaten Don set off with some canteens in search of water. For on the map there was a stream somewhere near here and the site of the old Hite ranch where Mr. Hite, a solitary rancher of many years ago, had made welcome those voyagers who survived Cataract. Some of them had arrived at his door half-clad and starving, with tales of horror about that passage.

The sun beat down on us; we kept wondering why Don did not return. At last Fred said he would go look for him—maybe he had run into a rattlesnake, maybe he had fallen. So off Fred went. After what seemed like hours, Charles and Bruce went looking for them both. Al read his murder, Tony and I sat and worried. We distracted ourselves somewhat by composing limericks; I wish I had written down some of his. They were very clever. Now and then I got out of the boat and in my sock feet waded, fully clothed, into the water, to stand there up to my chin, cooling off.

Fred got back at last, calling, "They're all right—but wait, wait!"

"Wait?" I was coming up out of the water.

But he wanted to get a picture of me in dark glasses and cap and veil, just a head above the brown current of the river, so I waded in again. Then he told us that Don had hiked all the long

six miles back to the ruins of the Hite place, had visited Hite's lonely grave. They were all on their way, would soon be here. Tony and I were quite cross to think how we had worried. And it was nearly five o'clock when they came limping toward us. "Wasn't worth it," Charles said.

"Any water?"

Don had two canteens full. The others in their worry had gone off without their canteens. Bruce said, "River water isn't bad. I've been drinking it all day." But I thought we were still too close to White Canyon.

We stopped that evening where the river seemed to end. For there was a sharp turn ahead with a great wall of tapestried rock blocking its way. I set my tent low on the sand close to the water, the others mounted the first of a series of shelves on the receding cliff wall. There was a full moon that night, so bright it kept me awake for a long time, but I lay there, quite content, the river purring gently beside me.

I was up at dawn. The water was strangely blue in this early light, as if it were a clear stream, and the reflection of Tapestry Rock turned the shadowy stretches to gold. I started a fire and had the coffee boiling before the others rolled out. We had a slow, lazy breakfast that morning, and when we were ready to set out again Charles and Tony with their cameras mounted the high steps, the ledges of the cliff, in order to shoot the big boat as it moved slowly down the river toward Tapestry Rock with Al and Bruce rowing. I looked back and watched them as long as I could, so small and lost they seemed up there on the heights. The river twisted and turned and it was some time before the small boat caught up with us, for Bruce said, "Let's lose them," and he and Al pulled away at the oars with what seemed to me like superhuman energy. But in the end, the motor prevailed and we were overtaken and attached to the small boat by a towline, the motor chugging away cheerfully.

Little by little walls of the canyon mounted higher; they

held buffs and yellows as well as red now, and there were many arches set high on the walls, places where someday perhaps there would be a natural bridge, or a cave. We stopped once to walk back a way to see some petroglyphs, strange Indian carvings on the face of the rock. What did they mean? I wondered, standing before them with my parasol resting on my shoulder while the others took pictures. There were queer geometrical signs, concentric circles, animals—mountain sheep perhaps, a big bird with outstretched wings—and a number of shapes that were like footprints. Some showed five toes, others were just flat, perhaps moccasined prints cut there on the perpendicular wall. Was someone trying to say, "See, see. I have passed by here, I have left my footprints on the rock." An early Kilroy? Someone anyway, hacking away at the hard stone with the urgency of his mortality upon him. To leave some sign, to leave something that will last when we are gone—it is an almost universal human wish.

I went back to the boat while the others were exploring farther down a side canyon looking for more petroglyphs. I was thirsty and I thought the blue can with a spout felt heavy enough to spare me a drink. I tilted it up—and got a mouthful of white gas! Luckily I discovered my mistake before I had swallowed any, but it left a fearful taste in my mouth. I rinsed with river water. It tasted good in spite of the mud and, from then on, I drank it freely. Later this cost me a week in the hospital in Denver when I was sick with a virus, but suspected of typhoid, amoebic dysentery and other odd diseases and kept in solitary confinement—they called it isolation—while tests, all negative, were made. But I thought of no such possibility now. Indeed I felt utterly removed from the world, immune in every way to all its trouble. It was a singularly restful, remote and untroubled time, those days in Glen Canyon. The river itself, after the wild torments of Cataract, seemed to be resting from its turmoil. Now and then Al sang a snatch of song, never

more than a line or two—"I get ideas"—a most provocative beginning with no end. Or "The higher up the cherry tree"—and I will never know what was there. I only speculated idly and did not ask.

It was late that afternoon when we came upon one of the wonders of this canyon. On our right, where the red-and-black-streaked wall rose some thousand feet above the river, there was hollowed out a circular niche, from water level to sky, as if planned for a giant statue that had not yet arrived. Small trees were set in against the wall and they had a new, an almost tropical luxuriance. Here and there where water dripped through, there was maidenhair fern hanging down from a precarious footing on the wall.

We ran ashore and got out on the small strip of yellow sand that formed the boundary of a circular, somewhat shrunken pool. It was an enchanting spot. Tony shouted and the echo came back quickly. "I've got to get a record of this," Charles said. So he dug his recorder from the luggage, Tony brought out his horn and they, with Don and Al and Fred helping, carried the equipment around the edge of the pool, for Charles thought that would be the best spot from which to catch the echo of horn and voices. I stood on the ridge of sand and watched them flounder along the wall, sinking into quicksand, pulling out by the trees and bushes and making their difficult way, trailing yards of wire cord till they were directly opposite me. "All right, play, Tony, play," Charles shouted.

Tony lifted his horn, blew three notes that echoed and re-echoed—and were followed at once by a fearful rumble, loud as thunder. I think we all had the same thought at once, that the horn had struck that fatal note of just the proper pitch to find response in the rock overhead—as the violin may make a glass ring—and that the rock was going to tumble down upon us. "Let's get out of here!" Don shouted. I sprang backward toward the boat, the others came leaping and plunging through the

got my breath. Across from me, here where the canyon was perhaps thirty feet wide, a great hunk of the opposite wall had fallen, and quite recently, for some of the small trees it had struck were still partly alive, and the place where it had broken from the wall was a brighter yellow than the rest. Was there more that was just waiting for a jolt or jar to come crashing down? But I must not think of that—and I gave my attention to the luxuriant growth around me. I was amazed to recognize the leaf of the redbud or Judas tree. All the bushes and small trees here had a wild, fresh look, utterly unlike those that sparsely bordered the river. Here by the stream, so small that at times it was little more than a pool with a trickle at each end, there was a tropical richness. Of course we had been coming south all the time, I reminded myself, as I moved slowly along the narrow ledge against the wall of rock, pushing aside bush and branch, hoping snakes did not lie in my way. But it was cool in here.

Then I came to an end of my little shelf and had to descend to the level of the stream. Before me was a rounded rock that left no room on either side for passage. I could see that by hanging to a tree branch I might gain a first foothold. But after that, smooth curving stone stretched up to the top. The thing looked as big as a house. What was I going to do? Ignominiously give up? Or wait for somebody to come and boost and hoist me? No, that too, was a humiliating prospect. If the Mormons by faith could descend a canyon wall, I could by self-hypnosis mount this little private Gibraltar. I tossed my Cellophane bag up—and it slid right back at me. I tried again and it caught and stayed. Then I mounted to that first uneven foothold, saying to myself, "I am a fly, I can walk upside down, I can do anything, I am a fly, a fly, four-legged, sticky fly, I can't slip—" And up I went on all fours, catching up my bag and dragging it along with me as I mounted. And I did mount. Luckily the far side of the rock was less precipitous and I could

simply slide down on my seat. So I made it. I looked around. The walls had drawn closer. Now there was no place to walk but beside the shallow trickle of water.

I moved forward slowly. The air was deliciously cool; no sunlight at all reached me. I looked up and grew dizzy. Over my head the walls came nearer and nearer to each other, leaving only a jagged narrow strip of blue sky. My head reeled and I sat down on my heels, leaning my back against the wall. Ahead there was another curve. I felt as if I were inside a giant helical shell, immense, terrible, beautiful. I took a sip of paregoric, removed my shoes, tying the strings together and slinging them over my shoulder, then I went on, splashing the clear cold water as I followed the stream. I rounded the curve and the ground-space between the walls widened out. Here it was like an ornate Empire theater and high on the wall was a carved-out balcony where kings and queens might sit. Lower down ran a horizontal window box of delicate green maidenhair fern. The colors of the rock were incredible—low down here they were purply-black and mauve and, as I looked up and up, they turned to red and gold, and enclosed at the top a weird new-moon-shaped scrap of sky. I had to blink and rub my eyes. No wonder Fred and Charles had come from their first sight of this with faces alight, with words that fell from their lips, inadequate and broken. It was not only the singular beauty of this canyon but its remoteness that was so staggering. It was so wholly new to human eyes. One came upon it as if walking alone in a new-made, a virgin world. Then too there was a stillness here, as if infinity itself had moved in, pervading, surrounding one. Even the small stream moved lightly without sound. I walked beside it now in the noiseless sand.

I have been at Pompeii, at Stonehenge; I have been where countless generations of man have lived and died and left their mark. Such historic scenes give one a very special feeling of the continuity of human existence, of kinship with all ages of

man, and a wonder at the alterations of time. But here in Hidden Passage, where so few had ever come, was a new kind of wonder for me, related less to time than to eternity, akin to something greater than mankind. I saw now why Charles and Fred had had no words, could speak in no more than broken phrases. I could not do much better myself. No simple prose was adequate. Poetry, perhaps? I got out my notebook and pencil and tried:

> To Hidden Canyon come with reverence.
> It is a holy place, this nautilus,
> This mighty, spiral-chambered carven shell.
> Step softly here where seldom man has trod—
> So Adam walked in Eden's virgin dell
> That lay still dewy from the hand of God.

But what good were such words as these, telling those who would never come the proper manner of their coming?

Hidden Passage—it was well-named. I could not make it stand forth to be seen. Nor could Charles with all his fine cameras capture its essence or its meaning. I could hear him beyond that last curve, saying, "Let's try it from here now—no, the light—we'll go back a way." Their steps were muted to silence that spread tangibly around me, that set me apart, afar and alone. I looked ahead to where both walls drew in upon each other, curving away into what must be yet another mighty coil beyond my sight, and walked slowly on.

On one side above me the red and gold wall was streaked with organ pipes of black and rose and taupe, and on the other, a drift of fringed veil hung delicately purple across its topaz face. Around me now on both walls, within my reach, ran an even band some six feet wide of maidenhair and ribbon fern, moist, brilliantly green and trailing downward as if from a window box. Below it were powder-blue spears where water had left its mark. Both green and blue were reflected in the stream that lay mirror still right here. I walked beside it on a cool border of yellow sand that narrowed more and more as I went on. Then

before me there was only a sheer wall on the left, on the right a slippery, steeply-rounding mass of rock, and before me a dug-out oval pool little bigger than a bathtub, but deep. A shaft of sunlight spotlighted it with gold. Small waterbugs rested motionless on the clear surface of the water, their shadows black, immense, below them. Polliwogs zigzagged amo g them as madly as live spermatozoa in the field of a microscope. Nosy little things, I thought, and it amused me to think how man with all his pride and self-esteem, his importance and achievement, had been through the ages dependent for his creation on just such small nosiness as this.

I sat down and leaned against the wall with fern fronds tickling my neck and had another drop of paregoric—believing in many small doses rather than one large one—and waited for the others to come and give me a steadying hand over the slippery rock beside the pool. From here we went on together, coming on a long straight stretch where the sun, directly overhead, laid its hot weight upon us, and left no escape from it.

"There's the end of the line," Charles said, as we rounded another curve, and he pointed to where the stream deepened and narrowed and seemed to be wholly blocked by a great round boulder some twenty feet in height and offering no foothold. Impossible for anyone with a camera in hand. But the three boatmen had managed somehow to brace themselves against the wall and scramble up. We could hear their voices above and beyond the boulder and now all at once, like heralds from a tribe of savages, they appeared on top of it.

"What's on beyond?" Tony shouted.

"More of the same," Don said, and sliding on the seat of his bathing trunks he came down to where he could jump off into the deep water. Bruce and Al followed him down. I peeled out of blue jeans and shirt, for I had worn a bathing suit underneath that morning, and walked into the pool. It sloped quickly downward so I had to swim. At the foot of the boulder, I turned on

ants crawl across the sand, gathering up crumbs that had dropped from the table.

"That's all right. I'll just wait here for you," I said, "and you you can tell me all about Rainbow Bridge when you get back."

He looked thoughtful and, without seeming to notice what he was doing, scooped up a handful of sand and buried the ants under it. They burrowed out, found more crumbs and again set out in the direction they had been taking. He took up more sand.

"No, no, let them go," I said.

He stood up, crushed the ants under his feet. Then he gave me his quick reassuring smile, "There's nothing here to bother you, so—okay."

"It isn't nature, it's human beings one has to be afraid of," I said, "and there'll be none of them here."

"Let's go," Charles called from the lower ledge.

Fred stopped to ask, "What will you do all day?"

"Have a little peace and quiet for a change," I smiled. "But you might leave me your Stegner—I'll finish that."

They stuffed their pockets with sandwiches, a few odd cans of food, Tony and Charles shouldered their heavy photographic equipment and I stood and watched them trail off down the sandy shore toward the low green cottonwoods and elders that clustered around the mouth of the side canyon of Aztec Creek. Quickly they passed out of sight and hearing. I was quite alone, more alone than I had ever been in all my life, more so than I would perhaps ever be again. In a physical sense, at least. Beyond the rim of the canyon stretched mile on mile of rock and sand, empty of man, bare of all but the sparsest stunted growth of desert plant. Above was the deep blue cloudless sky and at my feet the river. The boats no longer tugged at their moorings, for the water had gone down overnight and they lay flat on the sand as if washed up by some storm of which I was the sole survivor. Oddly, I felt no hint of loneliness. Indeed I was rather pleased to have this day of solitude ahead of me. I thought of

I said aloud, "and we are too blind to the wonders of the world. It takes such a journey as this to make us see."

"These canyons would shock the most callous into wonder," Fred said.

"Yet I suppose each of us will remember them differently. What's sharp and vivid to me may have been overlooked by you. You know," I went on, "I wish everyone would write his own account of the Expedition, and tell it true. That would be like a half-dozen searchlights turned on the whole reality that is too much for one to illuminate alone." Suddenly I remembered an old Mississippi friend, Susie Neill—Susie Ridgway, that was. She used to look at me with a twinkle and say, "I wish I knew what you were thinking in the back of your head." I chuckled to myself. That was what I really wanted to know about these companions of mine.

"Of course," Fred said, "Charles will have the physical reality on that film of his—and as he goes around the country giving his lecture, he will tell it as it seemed to him."

"Yes, I'm looking forward to that."

"Will you write what you really thought?"

"I'll try. Though the hardest thing in the world is to be completely and truly oneself." Then after a while I asked, "What does it mean, Fred? All that we saw and did."

He puffed on his pipe in silence for a bit. "The meaning—it's always so damned elusive."

Yes, I thought, how often reading a book I had said to myself, "Now here's a man who really *knows*. He will tell me. In the last chapter, maybe." Then when I got there I saw that, for all his learning, he knew no more than I. And science, too, all too often just bogged down in fact.

Fred said, "Maybe we each have to seek it alone, face it. Not forgetting we are all a part of the same mystery, and so not alone."

"But at least we got a *feel* of something, didn't we?" I per-

sisted. As when Bob was telling me about his research, I did not understand the detail, yet I got a glimmer of its essence. And suddenly I remembered the old man on Tangier Island, the oyster man. He said, "Sometimes when I'm on my boat alone at night, I lie on the deck and look up at the stars and I get a feeling." So now, looking up at the wide sky I repeated, "We got a feeling."

"Um-m," Fred agreed. "Of time, of having been where past and present meet. Those rocks. The history of the earth is in them. And coming up here on top again, there's the feel of this world, revolving in space."

"Makes me small, diminished. And yet bigger too, more important. Because I can see and wonder, because my mind can leap from the marshes of the dinosaur's day to this. Oh Fred, we see more than those coral bugs at Jones Creek! That's something." Then I quoted another stanza of the poem I started that day in Hidden Passage:

> All things hidden lead us on and on.
> The root and end of man are secret things,
> But in this rocky heart of solitude
> The fearful, deep, primeval silence brings
> A kind of answer to our WHITHER? WHENCE?
> A whisper that can almost tell us WHY.

Fred said little, but I think he liked those lines. Anyway, after a while I was emboldened to ask, "Did you get what you came for, Fred?"

"Um-m—yes, I think I did."

Then, feeling as if we were the only two left living on this wide dark circle of the earth, I told him what I had imagined about him on that first night of our meeting, back in Green River, Wyoming. "Was I right?"

He turned in the semidarkness and gave me a rather amazed look. "That was—some of it." For always there is more, deep down, where none can see. "What about you? Did you get what