THROUGH THE GUATEMALAN LOOKING GLASS

By

Marjorie Parker

How I pitied the women of Guatemala on that first visit to the Central American republic. Theirs, I felt sure, was a hard lot. No electrical equipment to speak of, sometimes washing at primitive tubs in the town square or cooking over an open fire. Of course, life did seem more leisurely. They never hustled — always walked sedately — always had time for the *siesta*. I was pondering this anomaly when, in my usual headlong fashion, I burst into Señora's dining room one sparkling August day.

"Why you ron?" said Señora, her brown eyes twinkling her amusement. "You go upstairs, you ron. You come down, even more faster. You go outside like a million devils chase you. For what you hurry? Is the same tomorrow.

"Now you are in Guatemala. In Nort' America everybody go whoosh." She emphasized the word with a quick sweep of her hand. "Three years ago I am in America. No for the first time. I go up there nine or ten times. But last time I stay three months. I lif in all kinds of houses.

"But all those people have the same problem. Money! They are always, what you say, broke. Some is making $300 a month, not enough, $2,000 a month still not enough. They talk all the same tr-r-ouble. All time ron to make more. They all ron, ron, ron. For three months, I am breathless just like you." She favored me with a glance. "Why they ron?" she asked, looking around

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at the five North Americans at her table.

Our silence encouraged her into further consideration of the Northern peculiarities. "Maybe is competition. All peoples rons to make more, to get ahead of other fellow. Ron for boos, for street car, for train. All peoples is hongry. But not like Europa. In America is plenty of food, but no time to eat it. In Guatemala shops close up tight for two hours at midday. In America mens have lonch in ten minutes. No siesta. Never stops. At night they are, what you call it, exhaust. Do they stay home? Put up the feet?" Señora shook her head, her lips curling in disgust as she said, "Ron out to movie."

"You have many queer customs in Nort' America." She looked around at us for confirmation. We were in no position to see ourselves as queer, and receiving no response, Señora proceeded to prove her assertion.

"Now I am there in the summer. That heat, it is killing. I am never cool. Not when I sit inside even." We Northerners smiled understandingly. We all had good reason to marvel at Guatemala's wonderful mountain climate.

"Up there I stay in the house all day. But on Sunday it is church and I muss pray. How to go and keep cool? I think of my white dress. That is what I will wear, my white dress and hat and shoes. In the church I see many others in white, and I feel, how you say it, very chic.

"All that week, it is what you call seezling. We must sleep on the floor. So when Sunday comes, I think, it is good to wear my white dress again. But, when I enter that church, I am surprise. All those ladies are in black. Black hats, black dresses! I say to myself, of course, a national hero has died. They are in mourning. I am a disgrace to myself in my white dress. I try to hide in the back row.

"On the steps, I am bold. I say to a nice old lady who is near me: A great man has died? She looks surprise, so I say: All the ladies are in mourning, yes? And then she starts to laugh. Not mourning, she tell me, it's after Labor Day. And that's how I learn that you never wear white after Labor Day, even if you cook.

"That save the daytime is another thing, so foolish. Iss so stupid, I think. I cannot know where I am at. I rush for three o'clock train, and it goes at four. I think my watch is wrong and I reverse it one hour. The next time I have appointment, I am one hour late. It isn't my watch, it is this saving the light. I could never learn. Always is confusion."

Laughter swept the room as Señora rose to leave — laughter was hearty but a trifle sheepish. Perhaps all the world's queer customs were not in Guatemala as we had somewhat smugly assumed.

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By David C. Hart

THAT AWFUL MOUNTAIN: *the* MATTERHORN

THERE is probably no other peak in the world that has fascinated the mountain lover more than the Matterhorn. Jutting up along the Italian-Swiss border, isolated from the world by a narrow-gauge railway, the Matterhorn stands alone, beckoning the mountaineer to try his skill.

In the late summer of 1954, a group of us from the University of Iowa Mountaineering Club got off the train at Zermatt, Switzerland, all with the idea of making a stab at "that awful mountain," as it is commonly referred to by the local townspeople. The peak itself cannot be seen from the station, but as we walked up the street toward the center of town, it poked its head majestically into clear view.

Since we had arranged to meet our guides in town, we wasted no time in leaving and heading for the lower ramparts of the peak. It is approximately a five-hour hike from the town of Zermatt to the Hornli Hut, situated at the base of the "pyramid," which is the jumping-off place for the real climb.

Immediately we began climbing the long, winding trail of the lower slopes, through flowering meadows. The town faded away behind us. Gradually the Alpine meadows turned into rocky grasslands, and finally into talus, a type of terrain covered by loose rock. Although the sun was sinking behind the peak, there was still plenty of time to climb the snow-covered stretch leading up to the hut.

The Hornli Hut is typical of the huts that are placed around Switzer-

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