

As the White Man Weds

THE STORY OF JOHN HAMILTON AND THE GIRL LOLITA OF THE MOCTEZUMA

By Harry L. Foster

WHEN John Hamilton took the girl Lolita from her native village on the Moctezuma River, and carried her over the mountains to his mining camp in the San Angel Valley, his sole intention was to be a guardian to her. She was little more than a child, a half-breed child of the Mexican desert, and Hamilton had too much principle to marry a daughter of the wilderness, whom he could never take to his own country. For Hamilton, although a miner by profession, hated the bleak land in which he worked, and knew that some day he must return—alone—to civilization.

He first met the girl upon the banks of the Moctezuma, when he was coming out to take charge of the isolated San Angel silver mines.

He had found his way with difficulty over the long trail that leads from Hermosillo across the brown expanse of cactus and mesquite, and over the bleak, forbidding foothills of the Mexican Rockies to the isolated village of Suaqui; but here the trail divided. He paused in the center of the wide, shallow stream, looking about for some one who might direct him.

Across the river stood a group of mud dwellings. The bank was lined with native women, washing clothes in the river and pounding them clean upon the rocks, or filling deerskin sacks with the turbid water. They were homely women, dark-skinned and heavy, with the stolid features of their Aztec ancestors.

Hamilton's eye fell upon the girl Lolita, and rested there only because she was different from the others. Her tint was lighter, her figure more slender, her eyes larger, her cheek bones less prominent. She stood barefooted in the stream, beside a small burro laden with receptacles for water; but instead of filling them, she was engaged in

washing her long, black hair. The afternoon sun sparkled upon her silky tresses.

Hamilton urged his horse toward her, and accosted her in Spanish.

"Which trail leads to the San Angel?" he asked.

Seemingly lost in reverie, the girl had not observed him before. Now, as she glanced up, her eyes widened, and a flush of color suffused her bare throat. Smiling timidly, she pointed out the road. Then, in a panic of confusion, she wrapped her arms about the neck of her burro, and hid her face in the animal's ratty mane.

At the San Angel, when he finally arrived there, Hamilton made casual inquiry about the girl.

"Oho!" said Creighton, the assistant manager. "She belongs to the old hag that runs the village inn."

"But she looks half Spanish."

"Probably is. Her mother never kept a register in the hotel." Creighton grinned broadly at the manager. "If you're interested, the old lady'll sell her for two hundred dollars gold. Personally I think it's too darned much—in this country!"

Hamilton was not interested, and dropped the subject.

During the fourteen months that followed he scarcely gave the girl a thought. He had his hands full with the San Angel, with the problems of bringing machinery across the mountains on muleback, shipping out his bullion on burro trains guarded by troops of hired Mexican gunmen—all the many problems which confront the American miner in the far interior of a lawless country.

The San Angel mine was beyond the protection of the Mexican government, for the Moctezuma Valley was ruled by the Yaqui Indians, who tolerated the presence of the

miners only upon the payment of frequent gratuities. Hamilton resented this demand for tribute, yet his stockholders desired him to avoid trouble with the Indians; and so, from time to time, he loaded his peace offerings upon the backs of mules, and rode with an escort of his gunmen to the village of Suaqui, to meet the chief, Talmatcho.

It was only on these occasions that he saw Lolita.

Suaqui was a neutral village, for its inhabitants were neither full-blooded Yaquis nor full-blooded Mexicans. The meeting of the hostile factions took place at the inn kept by Lolita's native mother. The girl herself would bring out the huge earthenware jugs of mescal wherewith the gratuity and its resultant peace were celebrated.

Hamilton watched her with growing sympathy as she passed among these men of a rough country, whose respect for women was less than their regard for the mules of their pack train. She seemed to understand his pity, for while she ordinarily avoided the eyes of the banqueters as she filled their glasses, she would glance shyly at Hamilton, and smile.

Old Felipe, Hamilton's Mexican foreman, noticed this.

"The girl, she like you," he told Hamilton. "All the time she make the goo-goo eyes. Nevair she make the goo-goo eyes like that before!"

"She's only a youngster," said Hamilton.

Felipe shrugged his shoulders.

"She have fifteen years. She no is child. Very soon her mother, she sell the girl."

"Not to me," said Hamilton.

II

LATE in the evening, when both Yaquis and Mexicans had thoroughly primed themselves with the fiery mescal, the girl's Indian mother brought forth a guitar, and called upon Lolita to dance. It was manifestly the woman's scheme to exhibit her daughter's charms to prospective buyers.

The music was weird, barbaric. The dim light of a swinging oil lamp fell upon a sea of dark faces, and shone upon the cartridges bristling from leather belts crisscrossed over the shoulders of the natives. Lolita's dance was a strange, graceful series of motions, half Spanish, half Indian—a dance of the swift red deer that abound in the mesquite of the Sonora desert. Hamilton saw only her liteness and beauty; he did not understand that she was dancing for him.

Neither did the other men understand it. They saw only the warm flush of her cheeks, the grace of her slender ankles, and the swelling curve of her bare throat. They stared at her as they might have stared at the wanton women of a frontier town.

Talmatcho himself offered to buy the girl. Turning to Hamilton, the chief demanded that the tribute from the mines should be paid at once, that he might have gold wherewith to make his purchase. Hamilton saw the horror in the girl's eyes. Once in the desert he had seen the same horror in the eyes of a rabbit cornered by mongrel dogs; so he bought her himself, refusing tribute to the Yaqui.

His defiance of Talmatcho sobered the gathering. Hands fell upon the hilts of knives, and guns were drawn, but there was no fight. Talmatcho, expecting no such defiance, had come to the meeting with only a few of his men, and an Indian never fights when outnumbered.

"*Bueno!*" he said. His face, with its high cheek bones, its small, crafty eyes, and its cruel mouth, was scornful. "To-night you can take the girl; but remember, *señor*, I am chief of all the Yaquis of the Moctezuma Valley. To-morrow I can crush you and your fellows and your mine and the girl—as I crush this thing!"

He picked up an earthenware cup, and crushed it to bits in his hand.

Hamilton carried the girl from the inn, and lifted her gently to his saddle before he mounted. Behind him, as he rode over the dark trail toward the San Angel, Felipe and his Mexicans were ominously silent, each thinking of the possible consequences of the American's act. Hamilton himself was troubled only about the girl.

"I shall be nothing more than a guardian," he said to himself.

Putting his arm around her, he straightened her to a more comfortable position in the saddle, with her head resting contentedly on his shoulder.

At the San Angel he turned the girl over to McPherson, the grizzly old shift boss. McPherson was noted as a woman hater. His housekeeper was an aged, weather-beaten squaw, deliberately selected because of her years and general unsuitability for romance. This household, Hamilton knew, would be the safest place for the girl.

McPherson did not relish the responsibility. He removed a clay pipe from its usual resting place in the middle of a spot-

ted gray beard, and made the one comment with which he habitually expressed his attitude toward the gentler sex:

"Hell fire!"

He called his housekeeper, however, and sent the girl away with her. Lolita glanced questioningly at Hamilton until he told her emphatically to go with the woman, whereupon she smiled and obeyed.

Then Hamilton assembled his half dozen American engineers and bosses, recounted his quarrel with the Yaquis, and outlined his plan of campaign.

"We'll have to fight," he said quietly; "but it's something I've been wanting to do ever since I became manager of this outfit. We have enough machine guns in the blockhouse, and enough dynamite in the arsenal to blow up the whole Yaqui tribe. The trouble with these Yaquis is that no one has ever faced them. The Mexican government never bothers them. The other miners make them presents, just as we did. We're going to fight!"

Together with his bosses, Hamilton spent the day in going over his mines and working out a plan of defense.

The San Angel diggings lay in the center of a ragged, bowl-shaped valley in the heart of the mountains—a group of gaping shafts beside a huge stone blockhouse, with its thatched laborers' quarters straggling out into the cactus growth of the desert. On all sides the country was broken and uneven, a hideous waste of sand and mesquite, undulating and scarred with the deep-cut beds of dry mountain streams. It reminded Hamilton of No Man's Land; and with the aid of two or three overseas men in his engineering force, he worked out an elaborate system of defense, which, if successful, should end the Indian problem.

Only Creighton criticized him for what he had done, and Creighton's objection was personal.

"My Lord!" he exclaimed. "You take a girl from the Yaquis, and invite them here to break up the mine and kill the whole bunch of us; and then you turn her over to the celebrated Scotch sphinx, who beats his own squaw every Thursday and Saturday afternoon just to prove that he isn't sentimental! My Lord, why didn't you turn her over to me?"

"Would you stick to her for any length of time?"

Creighton grinned.

"Why don't you stick to her yourself?"

Hamilton pointed toward the desert.

"Because I'm not willing to stick to this. Some day I'm going back home. She's a nice little youngster, and it wouldn't be fair. No, Creighton, when some fellow comes along who'll be good to her, and not run away at the end of six months—"

"Perhaps!" said the assistant manager.

Hamilton strode off toward his own cabin, to wash for supper. His temporary home was just beyond the laborers' dwellings—a crude shack built from the gnarled trunks of giant cactus, and surrounded by a natural garden of yucca plants, now in bloom with their white lily flowers. As he passed the last laborer's hut, and caught sight of his cabin, he stopped in surprise. From the tin pipe that extended above its thatched roof a thin wisp of bluish smoke was curling peacefully upward.

"What the devil?" he gasped.

Filled with a sudden suspicion, he ran forward through the yucca and opened the door. Inside, bending over the stove, proceeding in a matter-of-fact way with the cooking of supper, stood the girl Lolita.

III

For a moment Hamilton leaned against the door frame and stared at her in frank bewilderment.

The girl appeared conscious of his presence, but she did not look up. She was stirring the beans industriously, placing a frying pan upon the stove, and pouring dough into it, or seizing a hatchet to chop down a stick of mesquite that was too large for the firepot—all with the businesslike manner of one who belonged there, and who was performing an expected task.

"What are you doing here?" Hamilton demanded sternly, in Spanish.

"Preparing my master's supper."

She did not interrupt her work. Hamilton pulled out an empty dynamite keg which served him as a chair, and seated himself, to collect his thoughts.

As his eyes became accustomed to the shadows of the cabin, he began to notice changes. The cigarette butts had been swept from his floor. His rough wooden table had been covered with a towel. The blankets on his bed, which he had left in a tumbled mass, just as he crawled out of them, were tucked under the mattress along the sides and turned over at the head.

"My master's supper is now ready."

Automatically Hamilton moved his dyna-

mite keg to the table. Usually he ate at the blockhouse with the other bachelors, but he owned a stock of utensils, hitherto unused. Lolita had discovered them, and had removed their coating of dust. Now she came and stood beside him, intending to wait on him.

"Sit down," he commanded. "I want to talk to you." Then, remembering his manners, he rose, and held another dynamite keg for her. "How did you find my cabin?" he inquired, resuming his own place.

She smiled.

"The woman of McPherson brought me here. It was from her also that I borrowed the beans and the flour."

"But what right had you to do it?"

Her eyes clouded with innocent wonder.

"Was it not my duty?"

"Your duty?"

"Is it not a woman's duty to cook for her man?" She smiled again. "At first the woman of McPherson would not bring me. She said you were not my man. I told her that you were."

"The devil!" exclaimed Hamilton.

With mingled amusement and apprehension, he watched her eat. Her manners were the manners of the mule drivers who stopped at her mother's inn. She radiated such happiness and contentment that it was painful to disillusion her; but he saw that he must do so at once.

"Who told you I was your man?" he demanded.

"I have always known it. Even when I was a tiny girl I knew it. I am not stupid, like the other girls of my people, and I dream dreams. When I was a tiny girl I dreamed, and I saw the face of my man. It was a beautiful red face, with yellow hair on top. When I met you at the Moctezuma, I knew that you were my man!"

She spoke so confidently that Hamilton stared at her in amazement. She was wearing the same one-piece cotton garment she had worn when she danced at her mother's inn. It accentuated the womanly lines of her little bronze figure, but she talked as a child might talk. Hamilton saw that he must be harsh, even brutal, with the girl.

"See here!" he exclaimed. "I did not bring you here as my woman. I brought you here to save you from one you did not wish. When you are grown up, you shall be free to choose your man."

Her simplicity was maddening. "I am

grown up, and I have chosen." Then her eyes clouded with a terrible new thought. "Is it that my master has a wife, a woman of his own people, in his own country to the north?"

"No," he admitted.

"Well, then, why can I not be his woman? Am I ugly? Am I so dark as the other women of Suaqui? Am I fat and clumsy? Or perhaps my master does not like the beans?"

"You're only a child!"

She breathed deeply, and bent toward him.

"I have fifteen years. Are there not many girls of fifteen years in the village of Suaqui who carry children on their backs—the children of their men?"

Despite his effort to be stern, Hamilton could not repress a smile at her earnestness. Dropping his harsh manner, he spoke gently:

"Listen, girl. My home is in a city very far from here—a great city called New York, much larger than Suaqui. Its people are different from the people of Suaqui. Some day I must go back to them. I could not take you with me, for my people would not understand you."

Lolita stared at him, large drops forming in her eyes.

"I did not think of that," she said. "I thought we would live here forever and ever, as it was in the dream!"

She bent her head upon her tiny bare arms, and began to sob.

"The devil!" said Hamilton again. After looking at her foolishly for a moment, he walked over and stroked her silken black hair. "What other ridiculous things did you dream?" he asked.

She drew quickly away from him.

"It does not matter! They were not true! You do not wish to be my man!"

She rose to her feet, still sobbing, and, before he could stop her, ran out into the garden. For a second he looked after her, undecided. Then, filled with apprehension lest she might harm herself, he ran after her, calling her name. In the twilight he could see her cotton dress darting through the yucca.

"You little imp!" he muttered.

Suddenly he realized that she was running straight toward a cañon, where some mountain stream, now dried up, had cut a gash in the desert. Frightened, he dashed after her, tearing his way through the

thorny branches that barred the path. At the very edge of the precipice he caught her. She struggled to free herself, but he held her tight. Finally, ceasing to struggle, she looked into his face and smiled a teasing, mischievous smile.

"You wild Indian!" he breathed. "Why did you do this?"

She laid her head against his shoulder, as she had done when he carried her over the trail from Suaqui.

"My master did not want me. What else had I to live for?"

He picked her up in his arms, intending to carry her back to McPherson's cabin. Then he noticed that her legs and arms were scratched by the thorns.

"You poor little thing!" he exclaimed.

Suddenly she reached up and kissed him. Child though she was, her lips burned with the fire of her Spanish blood. He sought to push her away, but she gripped him with all her slender, wiry strength, and clung fast.

Around them the deepening twilight had softened the ugliness of the desert into a thing of beauty. The yucca lilies were fragrant. In the distance the rugged mountain crags stood out in shades of deep purple.

Hamilton glanced hesitantly down the street toward McPherson's home; then he carried the girl to his own cabin.

IV

WEEKS passed at the San Angel—long, anxious weeks spent in waiting for an enemy who failed to appear.

Pack trains crossing the long trail to civilization sometimes saw the blue smoke of a signal fire curling up from a distant mountain top; but Hamilton had taught his gunmen to travel with advance guard and rear guard, exploring the defiles for an ambush before they entered, and the Yaquis, evidently waiting for some opportunity when they might find the Mexicans less cautious, did not attack them.

Hamilton was not afraid of the Indians. His miners, trained daily in the use of machine guns and hand grenades—weapons which were sure to surprise the Yaquis—were showing increasing proficiency. More satisfactory still, they were losing the Mexican's traditional fear of the Yaquis. Imbibing some of the confidence of their chief, they were eagerly awaiting the day when they might put an end to the necessity of standing guard.

In the mines the rattle of steam drills and the creak of hoisting machinery still sounded as usual, and in the red glow of the smelter the ore ran sputtering in white-hot streams of molten wealth. Inevitably, however, Hamilton's policy of keeping a portion of the miners on watch was reducing the output of metal, and the manager was uneasy about this. He knew that presently his directors in New York would be inquiring as to the reason for this decrease in production.

Yet the matter which troubled Hamilton most during the long weeks at the San Angel was his relation with the girl Lolita. He was growing fond of her, he told himself, but it was only such a fondness as one might form toward a kitten or a puppy. He could not spend his entire life with her in the Sonora desert. In the light of day the huge, bleak, barren expanse lost the beauty it had held for him on the fateful night when Lolita first gave herself into his keeping. The monotony of the dreary landscape once more appalled him.

He knew that the half-breed girl could never adapt herself to the ways of his own people. He proved this by sending to Hermosillo for a wardrobe for her. Felipe brought it on the pack train. In a one-piece cotton garment Lolita was graceful and natural; in a tailor-made suit and shoes she was awkward, self-conscious, ridiculous. She would look at the pictures of actresses in Hamilton's old magazines, and try to ape them, but her performance was only a burlesque.

McPherson came to the cabin, took one look at her, and walked out, repeating:

"Hell fire!"

Creighton remained to watch and grin.

"Just picture yourself walking down Broadway with her," he said.

Lolita saw that they were discussing her, and inquired what they were saying. Hamilton lied to her.

"We were saying that you are much more beautiful than the ladies of the pictures," he told her.

He prided himself on the fact that he had never deceived her, and he regretted the lie, but he could not hurt her feelings. She smiled delightedly, and pirouetted about the cabin, walking with difficulty in the unaccustomed shoes.

"I like the way they squeak," she said, delighted. "They make much more noise than even my master's shoes!"

Then she ran to him and kissed him. She no longer approached him with timidity, but with a confident air of ownership. His khaki shirt, open at the neck, she buttoned carefully, straightened his wide-flowing tie. Then she took a cigarette from his pocket, placed it in his mouth, and lighted it. To these attentions Hamilton submitted good-naturedly; he liked them, and the realization that he liked them troubled him.

Creighton understood.

"You don't feel quite so conscientious now, do you?" he drawled.

Hamilton bit his lip.

"I don't know. I warned her in the beginning that it could not last. I haven't really deceived the girl. I try not to think of the future."

Creighton nodded.

"I've been through the mill several times. You're kind of satisfied, while it lasts; but when you get ready for a trip home, you suddenly remember that she eats with her knife, and that sort of thing."

Once dressed like the white ladies of the magazine illustrations, Lolita seemed to feel vastly superior to the other women of the camp. She did not neglect her duties as a housewife; but when Hamilton was away at work she would go down to the well, from which the squaws carried water to their homes, and while they stood there barefooted, filling their earthenware jars, she would display her silk stockings, frankly rejoicing in her superiority.

She would address them familiarly, as Spaniards address their servants.

"My man with whom I live is above all thy husbands in authority," she would say to them. "So am I above thee, for I am the woman of a white man!"

McPherson's weather-beaten old house-keeper on one occasion took exception to this.

"To-day art thou the woman of a white man," she told Lolita; "but to-morrow thou wilt be less than a widow, for the white man will leave thee, as my own white man will some day leave me, to return to his own people!"

Lolita turned upon her with flashing eyes.

"Say such an untruth again, and—"

Her Spanish-Indian temper escaped control. Reaching down to her garter, she drew a small, wicked-looking knife.

"It is the truth!" repeated McPherson's squaw stolidly.

Lolita advanced upon her, and the older woman seized a rock and hurled it. The other squaws scattered from their path. McPherson himself, coming down the trail at an opportune moment, intervened.

"Hell fire!" he roared, pushing his way through the crowd of native women, and seizing Lolita by the neck. "Drop that knife, or I'll smash your little jaw!" Then to his own woman he growled: "You go home! I'll attend to you later!"

Hamilton scolded Lolita that evening in his cabin.

"Why are you so sure that I shall never leave you?" he demanded.

She smiled a confident, mischievous smile, which made scolding difficult.

"So the dream told me. I have always known it, that you would come and take me, and would keep me as the white man weds—with one woman, forever and ever!"

"But why are you so sure that your dream will prove true?"

Her innocent confidence was still as strong as on their first evening together.

"Has not the first part of my dream proved true? Did not my master come, and did he not make me his woman?"

She crept into his arms and caressed him, running her fingers through his hair, and nestling her soft cheek against his tanned face.

"But some day, Lolita, I must go back to New York."

She laughed delightedly.

"Then I shall go with thee. Has not my master told me that I am more beautiful than the women of the pictures? If I thought that he was unhappy with me, I should kill myself, as to-day I should have killed the truthless woman of McPherson!"

"I am happy with you," he said.

She kissed him.

"Then we shall live together forever and ever, as it was in the dream! Say it, my master, for I would hear the words from thine own lips!"

Hamilton wavered. She was very much in earnest. If he told her the truth, he had no doubt that she would carry out her threat. Once more he lied to her.

"Forever and ever," he said.

Outside in the night there suddenly arose loud cheering and shouts of "Viva!" There was much tramping of hoofs and clinking of cartridge belts, and Creighton burst into the cabin.

"First blood for the San Angel!" he

shouted. "Pack train just came in—had a run-in with Yaquis, and drove them off without losing a thing! Brought the mail and everything!" He handed Hamilton an envelope. "Thought it might be important. It's from the New York office."

Hamilton opened it. It was from the president of the corporation. By the flickering light of a candle, Hamilton read:

We have learned through the Hermosillo office of this company that the noticeable decrease in production at the San Angel mines is due to your rash defiance to the Yaqui Indians, and your resultant policy of keeping a part of your force under arms, instead of leaving them at their work. You are well aware that it is our desire to maintain the good will of the Yaquis, and your conduct is in direct disobedience to orders from this office. We have therefore decided to request your immediate resignation as manager of the San Angel mines, and further request that you will leave the property at once.

Lolita put her arms about Hamilton's neck.

"My man is unhappy," she said. "I do not wish him to be unhappy. I wish him always to be contented, forever and ever!"

Hamilton was not listening to her. He was staring absently at the flickering candle.

V

LATE into the night Hamilton conferred with Creighton, McPherson, and the other Americans. They came to his house to congratulate him on the victory of his pack train, and remained to commiserate him on his dismissal.

"Hell fire! They can't mean it!" said the old shift boss. "We'll all get out, and let their damned mine go to blazes!"

Hamilton shook his head.

"The work must go on. When one assumes a responsibility—"

He stopped. He was thinking of Lolita.

"Yes," said Creighton, "we'll go on. I don't think we'll see the Yaquis again. That's the injustice of it. You've tried new tactics and made good—and you get fired for it."

"I wouldn't mind going, except for Lolita. I'm afraid she'll kill herself."

The girl was present, still with her arms about Hamilton's neck, but the men were speaking English.

"You'll have to kid her along," decided Creighton. "Tell her you're coming back. Perhaps she'll learn to like somebody else, and forget."

When the men had gone, Hamilton broke the news to Lolita. He was going away for

six weeks. He would return for her. Even if he did not get back within six weeks, she must not harm herself. She must wait for him. She promised.

"You believe me?" he asked.

The tears formed in her eyes again, but she nodded, trying to smile.

"Have I not heard it from my master's lips?"

Her head upon his shoulder that night reproached him with its faith and trust. He mentally reviewed the whole affair, trying to down his conscience with argument. He had taken the girl to save her from marriage with a man she hated. He had lived with her, and had promised fidelity, only to prevent her from foolishly sacrificing her life. He was not required to ruin his own future by taking the half-breed with him to civilization. Thus he reasoned that he was blameless; yet he could not rid his mind of this feeling of guilt.

He left early in the morning. Now that he had decided to desert her, he wanted to go as quickly as possible.

When the other Mexican employees crowded around his horse, inquiring the reason for his departure, he was forced to give them the same explanation that he had given Lolita. He was going away for about six weeks, he told them. Only McPherson's squaw divined the truth.

"Did I not tell thee?" she cried exultantly to Lolita. "Thy man leaves thee!"

Again McPherson averted bloodshed.

"Shut up!" he roared, slapping his squaw. "Damn women, anyway!"

Lolita tried to smile bravely once more.

"The woman spake not the truth!" she repeated over and over for the benefit of the other Mexicans. "My man returns. So has he told me himself."

When Hamilton embraced her, she clung to him until he tore himself away.

"Take the north trail," cautioned Creighton. "The Yaquis will probably be somewhere along the main road. Felipe's pack train is coming that way, and the Indians will be watching for him—unless they've decided to quit."

Hamilton shook hands with the men, and swung into his saddle. He did not dare to look at Lolita again, but as he rode away toward the mountain gap that led to the great world beyond, he knew that her heart and soul were with him. Long after the other watchers had retired, he knew she would be standing there in the finery he

had bought her, shading her eyes and gazing after him.

VI

WHEN he reached the mountains, and passed from the girl's view, he felt relieved. Much as he regretted his act, he sensed the satisfaction that always comes with an escape from an embarrassing predicament.

He would never hear from Lolita again. He would try to imagine that with the passing of time she had forgotten him. Perhaps her love for him had been only the calf love of a child. Perhaps she had never really intended to harm herself.

The north trail, unused since the building of the main road, was strewn with rocks and overgrown with brushwood. Forcing his horse over the difficult path took his mind from Lolita. As he scanned the prickly forests of cactus and the towering crags of dull gray rock, he rejoiced that he was leaving the desert.

Evening found him at the top of the pass, high up among peaks that glowed red in the last rays of the setting sun. Below him, miles distant, he saw the Moctezuma River meandering across the valley like a silver ribbon, and beside it he made out the dark adobe huts of Suaqui. It was the hour when the wilderness becomes beautiful, and, despite his strongest efforts, it carried his memory back to Lolita.

As he rode forward down the last of the sloping foothills to the valley, the colorful sunset gave place to pale white moonlight. His horse, scenting fresh water ahead, quickened its pace, and carried him at a gallop toward the river.

"Halt!"

Hamilton gripped the lines, pulling the animal back sharply upon its haunches, while his free hand whipped out a revolver.

"*Quién es?*"

It was a Mexican voice. Hamilton shouted his name. There followed a whispered consultation on the opposite bank, then an order to advance. He rode forward, and found a group of the young men of Suaqui, all of them armed.

"The *señor* did not come by the main road?" they asked.

"No. What has happened?"

"The *señor* owes many thanks to his patron saint!"

All talking excitedly, they told him the news. Felipe's pack train, on its way to the mines, had been ambushed by Yaquis.

The escort had been annihilated—all except Felipe, who had escaped with the story. He was at the inn, wounded.

Dazed with the horror of the catastrophe, Hamilton hurried past the villagers and rode toward the inn. Lolita's mother was in the doorway. He dismounted and pushed by her into the building. Inside he found Felipe reclining upon a cot.

The old Mexican was apparently delirious from his experience.

"Talmatcho!" he shrieked.

Hamilton knelt beside him.

"Listen, Felipe—I'm not Talmatcho. I'm your friend. I'm Hamilton. Don't you know me, Felipe?"

A faint light of recognition came to Felipe's eyes.

"Yes, *señor*," he said weakly. "Go away, *señor*—Talmatcho look for you. One devil, Talmatcho! He hurt Felipe—stick him with sticks—he tell Felipe he do it because Felipe help Hamilton take the girl."

His voice became incoherent. When the words again became distinct, he said:

"I am Talmatcho. Now I go to the mine for keel everybody—everybody but the girl. I know where *Señor* Hamilton keep her—in one cabin in the yucca, yes. The girl I no keel. I keep the girl!"

He looked up at the American.

"Talmatcho tell me all that."

Hamilton drew back in dismay. The girl was alone in the hut on the edge of the settlement, and the Yaquis were now on their way toward it! And the miners, believing the Yaquis had been finally beaten, had relaxed their vigilance!

"My God!" he breathed.

"Too late now," Felipe continued. "Maybe Talmatcho, he have the girl. You get horse, *señor*, ride beeg distance."

Hamilton turned to Lolita's mother.

"Sell me a horse, a mule, anything that can travel. I've got a hard ride to make!"

The village priest, who stood at Felipe's bedside, laid a hand on Hamilton's arm.

"You are already tired, young man. Rest here to-night. It is a long journey to civilization."

Hamilton's jaw set hard.

"I'm not running away to civilization. I'm going back to the San Angel, to fight for my woman!"

VII

WITHOUT hesitation Hamilton took the main road. It was the very trail upon

which the massacre had occurred, and the route which the Yaquis were now traveling, but it was shorter than the north trail, over which he had come, and he must get to San Angel before the fighting was done.

There was no doubt in his mind now. His one thought was of the girl in the cabin among the yucca—his woman, his wife.

"Good God, give her back to me!" he breathed.

He had not prayed since the days of his childhood. In all the hell of Château-Thierry and Belleau Wood, he had not prayed; but he uttered a vow this night, and he meant it.

"Forever and ever!" he promised.

The weird moonlight that seeped down into the depths of the pass made strange figures of the cactus. Every clumsy stalk seemed to reach out a grotesque hand, as if to pluck Hamilton from his horse. Every stone took the form of a crouching Yaqui; but he rode recklessly, caring naught for the danger.

Passing between two huge walls of rock, he came suddenly upon the scene of the ambush. His horse snorted and shied from the distorted carcass of a fallen pack mule—snorted and reared, and plunged into the briars; but he beat it furiously, forcing it past the gruesome spectacle.

He rode on without pity for the beast. When it paused timidly at the top of a steep descent, he spurred its flanks. Once it stumbled, and they rolled over and over down a sandy embankment into the bushes below; but he recaptured the animal, and continued his wild ride.

Even before he emerged from the pass into the valley of the San Angel, he heard the crackle of rifles and bursts of fire from his machine guns. It meant that the miners were putting up a fight. They had not been taken by surprise. If only Lolita had reached the blockhouse!

As he came out into the open, he could see the battle plainly. Two miles before him the dry, thatched roofs of the cabins were ablaze, illuminating the whole valley with their red glow. Quickly he located his own house on the edge of town. It was still standing intact.

Leaping from his horse, he ran forward on foot, keeping as much as possible in the hollows. Suddenly, as he advanced, there sounded before him a series of explosions that shook the whole desert. Then the rifle fire died out.

Hamilton exclaimed aloud with joy. The hidden charges, set by his miners as a death trap for the Yaquis, had worked!

Discarding all caution, he climbed over the smoking craters, and ran through the deserted village toward the blockhouse, beneath a shower of sparks from the burning roofs. He screamed his own name loudly, lest the miners should mistake him for an enemy. The gate opened, and McPherson pulled him inside.

"We've beat 'em this time, boy!" he cried. "Your plans worked! Guess you'll continue to be boss around here now!"

Hamilton looked around quickly.

"Where's Lolita?" he panted.

McPherson shuddered.

"She didn't—"

Without waiting for him to finish, Hamilton turned, dashing out through the gate. McPherson tried to stop him.

"Come back here!" he shouted.

"Come on, Creighton!" Hamilton cried, paying no attention.

"I wouldn't go out there for a million dollars!" exclaimed Creighton.

After saying which, he immediately changed his mind, and joined McPherson in a dash after Hamilton.

There was no further need of caution. The Yaquis were gone, never to return. Hamilton plunged through the yucca and reached his cabin.

"Lolita!" he called loudly.

In the doorway he tripped over a prostrate body. He turned it over, and lighted a match. It was Talmatcho. He had been slain by Lolita's knife.

"Lolita!" Hamilton cried again.

A weak little voice guided Hamilton into the cabin. He lifted the girl from the floor, and set her gently upon the couch.

"You're hurt!" he gasped.

"Yes."

Quickly he made her comfortable with pillows, and lighted the lamp. There was a bullet wound just over her heart, but she smiled bravely at him.

"I knew my master would return!" she whispered, as he placed an arm about her shoulders. "All day the other women have been saying thou hadst deserted me, yet did I know they spake not the truth!"

He saw that she was again wearing the cotton dress that she had worn when first he took her from Suaqui.

"My other garments have I laid aside, to keep them for the day when thou shalt

take me to meet thine own people," she explained.

Her voice was growing weaker. She held out her hand to McPherson.

"Good-by, Señor Mac. I am going away now. I am going away with my man to his own city of New York, a city much larger than Suaqui, to become a lady like the ladies of the pictures!"

McPherson knelt and touched the hand to his grizzly beard. Then he climbed to his feet self-consciously.

"My Lord!" said Creighton. "Mac's crying!"

"I ain't, either. Hell fire!" protested the shift boss indignantly.

Then he turned away hurriedly, that they might not see his face.

"Damn it!" growled Creighton. "You've got me doing it!"

The girl still tried to whisper something—something about a dream that was to last forever and ever.

When Hamilton rose, the breaking day was just beginning to reveal the wilderness outside in all its repulsive hideousness.

"Better stick around," said Creighton. "You'll surely be reinstated as manager."

But Hamilton remained only until he had erected a wooden cross above a little mound in the yucca. Upon the cross he inscribed the name—"Mrs. John Hamilton."

Zoe and the Swami

THE STORY OF A STRANGE EXPERIMENT IN SNAKE CHARMING

By Margaret Busbee Shipp

MRS. WARD recalled the many occasions which she had dignified as turning points in her son's life—her decision to remain in New York after her husband's death; the choice of Garren's prep school, of his university, of his profession; war and its reaction—these things and many more. Why, in her absorbed young motherhood she had felt that the worst was over when he outgrew his infant tendency to croup!

Everything which she had exaggerated as being important took its true place as trivial, insignificant, now that she was confronted with the actual crisis; for Garren had just told her of his engagement to Zoe, the dancer whose American debut had been one of the sensations of the year. He had brought his happiness to his mother, as sunnily sure of her sharing it with him as he had been of her sympathy when he cut his thumb in his childhood, or of her rejoicing when he was elected captain of his football team.

Garren had been a year-old baby at the time of his father's death, and Mrs. Ward had poured all her hopes, her prayers, her

aspirations, into the single channel of his happiness and well-being. Now she was suddenly confronted with the stark fact that if youth chooses to ruin its life, there is nothing that maturity can do but hold its painful peace.

With her habit of trying to see her son's point of view as clearly as her own, she realized how compelling the force of attraction which drew him to Zoe must be, to make him fall in love with a girl absolutely outside of his own class. What seemed to her the most astounding tangent was to him the straight road to happiness. He was triumphant over his success in winning Zoe—heartbreakingly triumphant, it seemed to his mother, as she recalled the one occasion on which she had seen Zoe.

Garren had taken a box one evening, and his party arrived not long before Zoe's entrance. Her appearance was the signal for tumultuous applause.

"Did you ever see anything more deliberately indifferent than her manner?" exclaimed Freddy Wright. "She manages to convey the idea that she is hardly conscious of that noise—neither annoyed nor