

# LITTLE MOCCASINS

**R**OUGHTON paused and listened before emerging from the mouth of the prospecting tunnel. He had caught the echo of hoofs striking the rocks in the dry stream bed, twenty feet below, but two years as sole inhabitant of the canyon had made him wary. A cautious survey filled him with surprise; a Navajo girl was approaching down stream, alone and on horseback.

By Elizabeth Lambert Wood

She was leaning low in the saddle, her eyes running along the edge of the bank as if intently in search of something. From the slim fingers of one small brown hand dangled several bulbs, the damp earth still clinging to them.

Roughton waited silently till the strange rider was almost beneath the dump on which he stood, then leaning over its edge, called gently: "Buenas dias!"

The girl brought her pony to a standstill with a quick pull, and sat staring aloft, her bosom under the soft full blouse of red calico rising and falling in startled, hurried breaths. Her eyes were anxiously scanning his bearded, sweat-seamed face. Her feet, in pale-tan moccasins of softest cured buckskin, intricately beaded, were trembling against the rudely whittled, wooden stirrups.

It was growing late. The sun had gone down, and the night already gave promise of being of clear and frosty cold.

"You're tired—you need something to eat?" asked the miner kindly.

The dark, interminable depths of the girl's eyes were still bent on him—a thoughtful, searching scrutiny. But at last she smiled faintly as if satisfied, and then Roughton saw the real want of her face.

"My father sick," she explained; "him hogan long way. This make him well." As she spoke she held up the bulbs of wild tulip. "I ride all day. I find—two—three—that's all." Her voice was sweet and curiously plaintive.

At the pleasant sound, all at once Roughton was astonished to feel the throbs of his thirty-five-year-old heart quicken to a furious beating against the curve of his strong ribs.

"Old fool!" anathematized he with a disgusted shrug of his fine shoulders. Turning to the girl, he said earnestly, "You very hungry and tired. Come, I give you supper."

He slipped down over the sliding dump to her side, and laid a light, detaining hand on her pony's bit. Without a word of protest the weary girl suffered him to lead the way down the canyon to his low, roughly-built cabin.

"You stay here," he urged compassionately, as he lifted her to the ground. For an instant she reeled unsteadily with fatigue, then followed docilely, Indian fashion, into the cabin, where Roughton set to work to build the fire and prepare supper.

Out of doors under the clear sparkle of the stars the frost began to creep out of the ground, stenciling the rocks and cliffs with delicate silver tracery. Within the rude room the fire shed a ruddy, playful light in which Roughton moved alertly, busied with his ministrations.

After supper the girl stood irresolute beside the table. Then with a sudden movement she began wrapping the brilliant plaid shawl about her head, over the glossy curtain of smooth black hair, and about her slight, supple shoulders.

Roughton entered a vehement protest. "No, no! You stay," he urged. "Tomorrow I give you white man's medicine. It make your father well quick."

The girl meditated pensively with pretty indecision, her small feet moving restlessly in their doe-skin moccasins. Perhaps she found it comfortable to have a resolute male deciding for her; she wavered and put up her pretty brown hand as if to unwind the shawl.

Roughton was amazed and not wholly flattered by the strength of the emotion that was now possessing him; he who prided himself on being lethargic and independent. A slender girl—and of a color different from his own—had come slipping down the canyon with the twilight, and suddenly the miner found himself transformed from a care-free individual to a being consumed with a passionate longing to keep near him the strange bit of femininity.

The girl was very weary. The bunk in the corner, heaped with tousled furs and blankets, was most inviting. With a final sigh of deep relief she unwrapped the shawl.

Roughton smiled and nodded his head, at the same time giving an encouraging gesture toward the couch; then he fell joyfully to work stacking up



He was advancing resolutely towards her again

the dishes. Often while he worked he paused to listen to the girl's gentle breathing, and to watch with absent, thoughtful eyes the rise and fall of the soft red blouse above her bosom. He fell to humming to himself under his breath just from the ecstatic delight of once again working for someone besides himself. After the work was done he found even a greater delight in denying himself the luxury of his usual after-supper smoke because he feared the fumes might disturb the slumber of the pretty, dusky-haired dreamer.

When he had silently finished setting the cabin in order, he rolled himself in a blanket and lay down on the floor beside the stove, where he stared long and solemnly into the shadows before he fell asleep.

**S**TRANGELY enough the girl was the first to waken in the morning, and had been to the stream and back when Roughton woke with a start and sat up, blinking at her standing, fresh-eyed and lovely, in the doorway.

She smiled gravely as he leaped up to greet her, and moved quietly aside as if to let him pass, then began folding up the blankets on the bunk, quite as if there was no such vital thing in the room as a man throbbing with a strange madness.

With a stride he was beside her. "Usted mio mujer!" he demanded, catching her hands in a fierce grasp.

"Oh!" she gasped, drawing back; but there was no hint of fear in her eyes—there was instead a covert suggestion of coquetry.

"Si, si," he urged. He was breathing heavily. He reached out a strong arm to wind about her, but she was too quick; she sprang back and reached the door, where she paused to say:

"My father mucho sick. I take this; make him well." She held up the roots of maraposa.

"No, no; you stay," he pleaded. The tone of dejected loneliness in his deep voice was pathetic. He was advancing resolutely toward her again.

"My father give me to Pablo next moon," she explained, hanging her head. "He promise Pablo. My father old; Pablo bring us much meat."

Roughton's hot blood cooled; a copper-colored maiden should not hesitate when wooed by a prospective husband of superior blood. He stepped back and his arms dropped.

The girl had been taken unawares. She now stole a wary glance at her white lover—he was good to look at—any woman, white or red, could see that. She waited in the door, but he had taken her at her own words, and stood with drooped head and gloomy eyes. Another minute or two she waited—thought of her father and Pablo scattered to the winds—until a whinny from her pony moved her feet, and she darted forth into the air. She saw all things with new eyes; she was a woman admired of men, and one of them was a white god!

With a strange ache in her heart she stood silent while Roughton saddled her pony and lifted her to its back. Without a word he left her, but was back in a moment, handing her a small bottle.

"Your father take this," he explained. "Medicine. Make him well."

Silently she took it from his hand, her beautiful, questioning eyes on him, then burying her face in the folds of her shawl, she rode away.

**R**OUGHTON dragged his feet back into the cabin, after the last glimpse of the girl and her pony had disappeared beyond the bend of the canyon, but the peace of his lonely home was forever gone. Gathering his tools together with a heavy heart, he shouldered them and set out for a long day of hard work in the tunnel. For weeks, in spite of his impatient resolutions, he found himself lingering over every little incident of the girl's visit. He was amazed to find himself repeating, over and over again, the few words she had said to him in her soft, liquid voice. He remembered where she had stood and how she turned her head.

Opening the cabin door late one afternoon, the sight of the dingy interior appalled him. He knew then that he could not endure the solitude of the canyon much longer. He would be forced to give up his work here and the splendid results it was promising.

With a mutter of rage at himself he plunged into the room and began stirring up the meager furnishings. He threw the deer skin rugs over the rocks outside to sun, and fell to sweeping the earthen floor. He would try to lighten his almost insufferable longing

for the girl by the prospect of a clean cabin and something extra good cooked for supper.

The thud of unshod horses' hoofs startled his attention. No doubt it was only a few range broncos on their way to the stream for water, but some instinct stronger than reason drew him to the door.

For an instant he saw nothing. Then behind a bush he made out the outlines of two ponies; and beneath a bough a face peeped out—a shy, brown face, softly oval.

"My girlie!" burst from Roughton's lips as he bounded toward her.

On the instant she stepped from behind the bush, light as a bird on her two nimble feet. Evading his embrace, she said breathlessly:

"I come—bring two ponies. We ride fast. Go see padre. My father come after me—Pablo come after me—" Suddenly she laughed out at some remembrance, showing her pretty teeth and looking up with adorable frankness into Roughton's intent face. "I run away!" she exclaimed. "I run away last night. Today, one time—two time—I think maybe you no want Indian girl—then I will die—" She was gasping over her words.

Suddenly, startled by a slight movement made by the ponies, she started back, crying excitedly: "I afraid they come. They make me marry Pablo." Suddenly all her bravery forsook her, and she broke down, wailing softly: "Don't let Pablo—don't let him get me!"

With an indescribably sudden movement, swift and sure, Roughton took her safe into the keeping of his strong arms. He was still dazed by this sudden accession of joy, but his senses rallied as he touched her.

"Come," he was urging in an awed whisper; "come, we go to the padre now." His handsome head was bent, listening for her answer.

## TO A CHILD

So like her, dear! From the deep  
Of the years I see her arise;  
What memories over me sweep!  
So like her, dear! From the deep  
Of the years comes a ghost to keep  
Strange trust in the light of your eyes!  
So like her, dear! From the deep  
Of the years I see her arise.

Stokely S. Fisher