



THE GIRL OF THE GOLDEN WEST

SYNOPSIS

ACT I

An evening at The Polka, saloon and general store of the mining camp

As Nick the bartender pours the drinks, the miners gamble, listen to the camp's minstrel, Jake Wallace, and take up a collection to send home one of their homesick companions, Larkens. Handsome catches Sid cheating at faro; Sheriff Jack Rance's intervention prevents an on-the-spot lynching. Ashby, the Wells-Fargo agent, tells Rance that he has new information that will enable him to capture the bandit Ramerrez and his gang of cutthroats. Rance's boasting that Minnie, the owner of the Polka, will soon be his wife provokes sarcastic contradictions from Sonora. Insults follow and Minnie herself separates the men. After reprimanding them she begins her regular Bible lesson.

A U.S. postman arrives with mail and news that one of the bandits has been sighted nearby. Nick announces that a stranger is outside asking for whisky and water. Minnie tells him to send the man in for a lesson on drinking. Rance tells Minnie he loves her and asks her to marry him. She reminds him that he already has a wife and explains with sincerity and simplicity that kind of love she hopes to find. Rance persists until he offends her. When the stranger, "Johnson from Sacramento," enters, Rance resents the cordial welcome Minnie extends to him. He tries to intimidate Johnson. Minnie and Johnson have recognized each other immediately; they recall a pleasant afternoon they spent together after a chance meeting in the mountains. Rance calls in the miners, determined to get rid of his rival. The men enjoy the spectacle of Rance's jealousy as Johnson dances with Minnie. Ashby enters with José Castro, one of the outlaws, under guard. When Castro sees his boss Johnson (alias Ramerrez) dancing, he sends Ashby and the miners off on a wild goose chase. Before he is led away, Castro manages to tell Johnson that the bandits are nearby awaiting the signal to rob the Polka.

Minnie asks Johnson to stay after the others have left. They talk of their past lives, their aspirations and of love. Nick interrupts them to announce that another bandit has been sighted nearby. A shrill whistle, which Johnson recognizes as the signal, frightens Minnie. She confides in Johnson that she alone must now protect the gold the miners have entrusted to her for safekeeping. She vows that whoever takes it must kill her first. Johnson, who has impulsively decided to stop the robbery, rises to leave and promises the disappointed Minnie that he will see her again later...at her cabin.

ACT II

As a blizzard rages outside Minnie's cabin, Wowkle, Minnie's Indian servant, sings a lullaby to her infant. Billy enters and carries out Minnie's orders by asking the girl to marry him. Minnie comes in and makes hasty preparations to receive Johnson after sending Billy on his way. Johnson is soon hospitably received and sharply rebuffed for an attempted embrace. He admires Minnie's room and finds her solitary existence curious. Johnson tells Minnie he has loved her since their first meeting and they embrace. Johnson says goodbye and is about to leave when Minnie tells him it will be impossible because of the blizzard. She offers him her bed and prepares a place for herself in front of the fire. There is a loud knocking and from outside the voice of Nick announces that Ramerrez has been seen on the trail to Minnie's house. Johnson hides and Minnie opens the door. She receives a double shock when she learns that Johnson is Ramerrez the bandit and that he is the lover of a Mexican woman who has betrayed him by giving his photograph to Rance, who gloats as he shows it to her. Nick notices Johnson's cigar and realizes that he is in the house;

he offers to stay, but Minnie dismisses the group and they leave. Minnie confronts Johnson. He tries to defend himself by explaining how he became a bandit and how he had decided to try for a new life with her, but Minnie orders him out. Seconds later gunfire is heard and the sound of a body falling against the door. Minnie opens it and finds Johnson wounded. Despite his protests, she helps him inside and hides him in the loft.

Rance reappears in pursuit of Johnson. When Minnie tells him there is no one with her, Rance suddenly makes violent advances, which Minnie repulses. Rance goes to the door swearing that Johnson will never have her. Suddenly a drop of blood falls on his hand and he realizes the fugitive is hiding in the loft overhead. He calls up to Johnson to come down, and the order is obeyed. Johnson seats himself at the table and collapses. Desperate, Minnie proposes a game of poker. If Rance wins, he takes the two of them; if she wins, Johnson is hers. Rance agrees to the stakes and they play. At the final hand Rance exultantly throws down three kings. Nearly fainting, Minnie asks for a drink. While Rance is distracted she substitutes cards she has concealed earlier for the ones Rance has dealt. When he brings her the whisky, she displays the cards in her hand: three aces and a pair. Dumbfounded, Rance keeps his word and stiffly departs. Minnie bursts into sobs and throws her arms around the motionless Johnson.

ACT III

Considerable time has passed. Rance, Nick and some of the miners are waiting while Ashby and the others track down Johnson in the hills. True to his word, Rance has not betrayed Minnie but he is confident that his moment of triumph is at hand. The miners rush into the camp with news of the manhunt's progress. Finally, Ashby appears with Johnson and formally turns his prisoner over to Rance. As the miners shout a list of Johnson's offenses, they prepare a noose. Johnson admits to the robberies but denies ever having killed anyone. Rance offers him a last chance to speak before the execution is carried out. Johnson asks the men to let Minnie believe he is free and far away. Minnie rides into the camp with a drawn revolver. She pleads with them to spare her lover, and her words produce a guilty silence. One by one Minnie addresses the miners who have been her life-long friends. Urged on by Sonora, they each agree to grant Minnie's request. Minnie and Johnson say goodbye to the miners and disappear over the horizon.