



# CARMEN OF THE RANCHO

By FRANK H. SPEARMAN © Frank H. Spearman WNU Service

## CHAPTER XVI—Continued

"But Monica, our faithful nurse, has told me that four days after the burning of the rancho and the murders my sister and I were brought back to the rancho by three white men with heavy beards. They could speak no Spanish; she could not understand a word they said, and they were not going to leave us with her until our old Padre Pasqual happened along, walking down from San Gabriel. The men, or at least one of them, talked by signs with the padre, and he assured them it would be all right to turn us over to Monica."

"Senorita," said her companion gently, "this is too hard on you. You are suffering. Don't tell any more now. I feel it myself." He drew a breath of relief. "Thank God, you did escape."

Carmen gave no heed to his plea. "Who were these men—those three men who saved my sister and me from—what shall I say?" She put her face into her hands, shuddering.

"Don't say, don't try to say, senorita!"

"From worse than death. For months we two lay ill, our lives were given up. Terecita died from brain fever. I, poor I, could not die. My aunt, Dona Maria, took me for her own. She and dear Don Ramon adopted me. For years afterward, señor, I would start out of a sound sleep screaming and sobbing. At other times horrible dreams assailed me."

"It was Dr. Doane and, most of all, the help of my religion and the ministrations of blessed Padre Martinez that brought me through those terrible years. Dear Padre Martinez! When everybody else despaired of my recovery he, almost alone, supported me and told me I must and should get well."

"For that reason—all my illness—when I became the foster daughter of Guadalupe it was strictly forbidden for anyone ever to mention the tragedy or the fact that I was not their very own child. . . . This is a very long story—"

"I can't tell you how deeply I feel it, senorita."

"You asked me why I was afraid of being carried away. I have told you. And I had a reason much more grave for recounting all this, Señor Bowie. And a confession to make. Monica, my Indian nurse, is still living. She lives with my brother near San Diego. Once in a long, long time Monica comes away up here to see me."

"Do you remember, Señor Bowie, that among the portraits at Guadalupe there is one of you?"

"I remember."

"Monica, the instant she saw your picture, screamed. When I quieted her these were the words she spoke: 'That is the man who brought you back to me at Los Alamos!'"

Her voice broke. She hid her face in her hands.

He spoke quietly. "Don't let that upset you. It might easily be a mistake. She could hardly remember after so many years, senorita."

"I argued with her. 'You told me those men were heavily bearded,' I said. 'This man is smooth faced.' She only shook her head. 'That,' she said over and over, 'is the man who laid you in my arms at Los Alamos!'"

"I was shaken almost to death by her story, señor. Shouldn't you be? Señor Bowie, were you that man? Try to recollect."

He stared at the grass by his side. At length he shook his head slowly. "She must have been mistaken." Plucking at the grass, he added with a slight tremor, "I wish it were true."

But Carmen had not done: she only pressed her victim more closely. "Knowing you as well as I now do, señor, perhaps better than you think," she continued, "I felt it would be well to talk first to Señor Pardaloe, because I knew he came with you to California and might explain it. I did talk with him. He confirmed the story absolutely, even to the beard. Señor Bowie, you are the man."

Struggling no longer with pent-up emotion, she burst into tears.

"Why, why, should this upset you so, senorita?" he pleaded. "It may only possibly be true. And if it were . . ."

Her eyes, as she raised them to his, flashed through the tears. "And if it were?" she echoed slowly and gravely. "It has been the dream of my life sometime, somewhere, to meet that man. In my heart I have said, 'If I can ever find that man I will wipe his feet with my hair. I will serve him at table. I will be his handmaiden for life.'"

"Henry," she exclaimed, holding out her hand for him to help her up, "how do you think I have stood it since Monica told me it was you?"

"Could it indeed have been I? Could that sobbing little brown-eyed girl I carried that day on my shoulder be this magnificent woman who stands before me now? Carmen!" His voice threw more into the words than she had ever heard from human lips. "I love you. I have loved you from the first moment I ever saw you, Carmen. That is the reason I had to leave Guadalupe. That is the reason I never could stand it to come back to Guadalupe and yet stay apart from you. Now you know everything!"

Her composure, as she stood, astounded him. It was now he who must work to control his voice and words.

"Henry," she said. His name on her lips maddened him. He caught her hands. "Do you know everything?" she asked. "Not quite—not how shamefully silly I once was. I don't know whether you can ever forgive me. But since you have told me what you have just now told me, Henry—what more must I tell you?"

## CHAPTER XVII

Dona Maria may or may not have guessed things when the young mistress of the rancho appeared at the dinner table. Carmen was a bit too animated to seem natural. And Bowie laughed at times, Dona Maria thought, without adequate reason.

"You made a long ride of it," she suggested as a leading remark.

Carmen responded composedly. "But not a fruitless one. I went out to capture a very wild horse and managed at last to coax him into the corral."

Dry old Don Ramon interposed an impudent question. "What did your wild horse coax you into?"

Carmen met the attack without a tremor. "Nothing to speak of. The important thing is, California can count one more caballero. Don Henry Bowie is coming back to Guadalupe."

Dona Maria rose to her feet, clapping her hands. "Glorious!"

"He has promised to stay."

"Better and better."

"But, of course," continued Carmen blandly, "you never can tell about really wild horses."

"They are serviceable only when actually brought to bit," observed Don Ramon dispassionately. "Felipe," he said to the houseboy, "here is a key to the wine cellar. Bring three bottles of the 1830 champagne . . . It was a good vintage," he observed, addressing Bowie.

The Tejano left in the morning for the fort to break away from Sutter. It was difficult to make his peace, but the captain was not wholly unreasonable. Bowie took him into his confidence, and in the end the veteran promised to come and dance at the wedding.

A week went before Bowie, very impatient, could get back to Guadalupe. Fortunately, in the circumstances, he reached the rancho in the evening. The night was clear. A full moon was rising over the mountains, and just within the patio a slender girlish figure, wearing the very highest of her combs and draped in her most elaborate Chinese shawl, waited to greet him.

"Three nights," she whispered when she could catch breath to speak, "three nights I have waited here long, long for you. Wicked Tejano, to keep a poor, poor girl shivering out here in the cold. You need not make excuses. I know you just forgot me. How are you, querido? And now that you have—what you call it—a job, you must ask Don Ramon in the morning for his daughter's hand—if you think her worth it. I, myself, don't. But I have heard it said that there is no accounting for tastes."

Don Ramon made the asking easy for Bowie. "If Carmen had done

as I wished she would have been yours long ago. You are welcome to my household, Señor Bowie. I trust you two may be happy together and may provide for Guadalupe the descendants for which my wife and I have vainly longed."

The betrothal was made an occasion of festivity at the rancho, culminating in a formal dinner to which Padre Martinez and his assistant and Aunt Ysabel from Monterey were summoned. The household and the guests sat at table late and had gathered in the living room with a fire in the huge fireplace.

While the talk went on Felipe came in to whisper a message to Bowie. He excused himself and was gone only a few minutes. When he returned Carmen looked at him questioning, but he ignored all curiosity concerning his absence from the room and no one asked further.

It was only when he and Carmen were alone after the guests had left and he was bidding her good night that he answered her question.

"It was a messenger from Dr. Doane. Felipe will put him up for the night."

"But what did he want?"

"He brought a message from the doctor to let me know that Blood is out again. He broke jail to-night at Monterey."

Bowie was in Monterey next day on business. His business was with Ben Pardaloe. When they had finished their conference Ben had engaged to return to Guadalupe. A fortnight later Bowie was riding along the river with Carmen. She had asked to visit the quarter of the rancho threatened by the squat-



"I remember."

ters—three of their shacks were visible from where Bowie and Carmen had halted. As they rode away a rifle shot echoed across the Melena, and Bowie heard the sing of the bullet as it passed.

"Run for it, Carmen!" he exclaimed, striking her pony and spurring his own. Not until they were well out of range did he slow up.

"What was that shot, Henry?" asked Carmen.

Bowie was thoroughly enraged but he spoke quietly. "Just another messenger from Blood—to make sure I know he's out of jail." Then he exploded, unable to restrain himself longer. "A man who'd do that in Texas would be shamed out of the country. It's all right to take a pot shot at me; I don't object to that. But to take one when it endangers the life of a woman! It only shows," he added after an ominous silence, "what a dog this fellow is. One of us will have to get out of this country."

On the morning following Pardaloe rode out to Guadalupe. He was welcomed noisily by the vaqueros and, having brought a goodly supply of poor tobacco, made the cowboys happy by passing it around.

"Ben is to be your boss, boys," explained Bowie. "And you are all to carry pistols now, along with your lariats and knives. Within three months I'll have six-shooters for all of you—they're ordered and paid for. We've got a bunch of pesky squatters on the other side of the river above the Melena. They expect to gobble up Guadalupe. They're mistaken, but they don't know it yet. We've got to set 'em right on that point—that's why I sent for your old foreman, Ben Pardaloe."

"Now don't misunderstand me. Don't start a fight with this scum yourselves—let them start it. But if you see one of them riding anywhere on the rancho, order him off. If he puts up a fight and you think you can handle him, well and good—go after him. If you think you can't, whistle for help. If you catch one of them running off so much as a sick calf, go after him fast with your lariat and gun and don't give him a chance to shoot first. Powder and lead are cheap. It's better

to shoot half a second too soon than one hundredth part of a second too late—remember that. This rancho belongs to your master, Don Ramon, and these squatters must be taught that it does."

"These boys," explained Bowie afterward to Pardaloe and Simmie, "have been cowed by Blood and his bunch, who have been doing about as they please. We're going to call Blood's bluff, and you boys know how to do it. I'm going to get him for killing Sanchez, if for nothing else. What's the talk in Monterey, Ben?"

"Well, they say Blood's friends let him loose. I saw Deaf Peterson there one night, and he acted mean. He's squatting over there with Blood. The talk—and I guess it's so—is that Blood has got together twenty or thirty guerillas, and he claims he's going to clean the country up. They're tough birds, and blood's got a special spite against Guadalupe."

"And Guadalupe's got a special spite against Blood," remarked Bowie. "But if the cuss does get a bunch of guerillas together they can do mischief. No matter. We'll just have to look alive till I can get my hands on him again."

"He claims he's aimin' to get his hands on you," grinned Pardaloe.

"I'm easier to find than he is, Ben. But we'll get together some day."

Pardaloe and Simmie went to Monterey next day after powder and lead and extra pistols and to pick up what they could concerning Blood's whereabouts. Bowie intended to raid the squatters the day following the return of the two scouts. He himself, on the day they left, took his vaqueros into the foothills to round up the herd from which steers were being run off by squatters and raiders.

That day Carmen took Felipe with her to go over to the mission on a joyous errand. She wanted to talk over with Padre Martinez arrangements for a wedding.

She found the padre a little thinner—each visit marked him as sooner to become a walking skeleton. But happily, he told her, he had not been molested by raids for some time and prayed and hoped for a long relief from depredation. His guard? Yes, he had his dozen Mexican soldiers; they were good fellows but were eating him out of house and home. Today they had gone down, likewise, his administrator, to San Jose for a fiesta; he was afraid some of them would come back drunk. And his poor Indians—they had mostly turned hunters and trappers to keep from starving. But, Deo gracias, they were firm in their faith. He wished that his soldiers behaved as well.

The scene that afternoon was as peaceful as the message from the other world which the mission had brought to men. The few girls and women remaining were busy with their varied tasks.

Carmen visited with them and asked questions and distributed largess, asking at the same time for their prayers.

She took supper with the padre and his assistant, and with Felipe started for home in the cool of the evening. They had not ridden far when the Indian signified Carmen to stop. He scanned the alameda ahead.

"Men, senorita," he said, "horsemen. Half a dozen or more. They are not our kind. I don't like to meet them with you."

"What shall we do, Felipe?"

"Turn back at once."

Hardly had the two faced about when the clatter of hoofs behind them indicated they were being followed. They broke the ponies into a swift lope; their pursuers rode faster. Fortunately, the distance was but short, and, as dusk fell, Felipe and Carmen dashed safely through the opened doors into the mission compound and Felipe, leaping from his horse, closed the clumsy gates behind them.

The clattering horsemen pulled up in front of the church and with many shouts and oaths scattered over the plaza, demanding admission.

Felipe, though mild, was game in a pinch. He caught up a blunderbuss from the guards' quarters and coaxed two neophytes to arm and appear with him in the church tower. The raiders yelled at them and one of them, a renegade mission Indian, shouted insolently to Felipe to open the gates or they would break them open. Felipe, equally defiant, declared he would shoot the first man that attempted it.

There were hesitation and wrangling threats among the horsemen. They milled around the plaza, while within the church Padre Martinez and all in the mission enclosure were on their knees before the Blessed Sacrament, beseeching heaven for aid in the extremity. An hour or more passed, with the raiders churning about the plaza but shy about testing Felipe's marksmanship from the tower.

(TO BE CONTINUED)

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