



CARMEN OF THE RANCHO

By FRANK H. SPEARMAN Frank H. Spearman WNU Service

CHAPTER XV—Continued

Carmen, whose chamber was closest to the living room, was awakened from her sleep by a piercing scream; then followed silence. Throwing on a wrapper, the Senorita opened her door and hastened into the big room. Monica, trembling, stood looking at a portrait. "Monica!" cried Carmen. "Was it you who screamed so?" "Yes, little one—yes. I am sorry. Yes, I did scream."

"What on earth is wrong, Monica? Are you ill?" The Indian woman was breathing hard. "Senorita," she quavered in a high-pitched voice, pointing to the painting, "who is that man?" "That is Senor Bowie. He was our rancho manager here."

Monica threw all her little strength into her cracked voice. She was trembling with emotion and again, as she spoke, she pointed. "My little Carmen! That is the man who brought you back to me from the Indians."

"Monica! Dear!" Carmen stared at her blankly. "Surely you are mistaken—your eyes . . ."

The Indian woman calmed down a little. "No! No! I am not mistaken."

"Remember, Monica," persisted Carmen, her own senses reeling, "you do not see as well as you once did."

"I see well enough to know that face, little one. If I were blind, my little one, those eyes would stare at me. You know, dear one, for years I was forbidden to speak of that terrible day. You were ill for years afterward, and no one was allowed to speak even a word of what had happened. But I tell you, that is the man who left you with me. I have seen his eyes a thousand times. Oh, where is he, that we may know what happened after you and Terecita were stolen so horribly?"

"Calm yourself, Monica," urged Carmen, shaking like a leaf. "Was the man alone?"

"No, senorita. Two men were with him."

"I don't think you can be right," declared Carmen, breathing swiftly. "He has never spoken of such a thing. I don't . . ."

Monica shook her head wearily. "I know only one thing. Whoever he is, that is the man."

"Until I am as sure as you are," said Carmen, "promise me you will not say one word to a living soul about this. I can find out. It will take a little time. Until then, not a word, Monica."

"No, my senorita, not a word. But find out yourself."

The almost distracted girl returned to her room to fall on her knees. Again and again she recalled every word of Monica's. Again and again she weighed them, doubting, fearing, overwhelmed with uncertainty and yet succumbing at times to the strange certainty that Monica must be right.

Dismay seized her with that conviction. The stern rule made by Don Ramon, after the breakdown resulting from her terrifying experience, that no word should ever be spoken of it in the family would account for a great deal. But whatever the mystery, the key to all of it must be in Bowie's hands; the thought left her prostrated.

She felt an impulse to send at once for him, to learn everything; but the sequel might be dreadfully embarrassing. Then the happier thought occurred that grizzly old Ben Pardaloe might know something, perhaps everything.

The longer she pondered, the more she felt sure that to him she must turn. Whatever there was of fact in Monica's story might be learned from him. Fired by her shock and uncertainty, unable to sleep that night, so distraught next day that Dona Maria chided her, yet tortured by her conviction that Monica was right and determined to resolve her doubts, Carmen made an excuse the second day to take Pedro and Maria and go to Monterey to waylay the old stage driver. Asking in Monterey at the stage barn, she learned that Pardaloe would be in late in the afternoon. She lunched with her Aunt Ysabel, pleading shopping to account for her trip, and in good time met the stage. Pardaloe was overjoyed to see her. She told him she wanted very much to see him. "I'm alaying over here tonight, se-

norita. What do you want to see about, hm?"

"It's some information I want, senor. I think you can give it to me."

"If I kin, senorita, it's yourn, right off."

"Senor Ben," she began low and seriously, "I need some help. I know you came into California about ten or eleven years ago over the mountains from Texas with Senor Bowie—is it not so?"

Pardaloe nodded. "'Bout that long ago, I guess, senorita, what about it?"

"Now I'll tell you what I know. About that time the Indians raided our rancho in the South, Los Alamos. They killed my father; my mother died from shock. My little sister Terecita and I were carried off by the savages into the mountains. Senor Ben, my sister and I were so nearly insane with fright that we could recall nothing of what happened except I seem to remember something about a fight. Beyond that, all memory leaves me. All I know, and this only because I was told so, is that we were brought back to the rancho—where everything had been burned—by a white man. Senor Ben, can you tell me, do you know, anything about that part of the story?"

Then the grizzled scout began to talk in his slow and deliberate manner. He retold the story of how he, Bowie and the Indian, Simmie, had rescued two tiny frightened girls from a fierce Indian band and had left them with a missionary somewhere along the Southern California coast.

Carmen pressed him for every detail and in the end she was practically convinced that Bowie was hero of her greatest childhood adventure.

In somewhat of a daze she thanked Pardaloe for all his information and the next morning she returned to the rancho.

Guadalupe did not seem quite the same to Carmen when she got home. There was too little in its present to interest her; too much in its past to think about. And despite her efforts to busy herself in things around her, Carmen faded in health and spirits. Not until Pedro came to her, hat in hand, one day in the spring with brief news did she revive. "Senorita," he said, "Sanchez and I, we were over at the valley of the pines yesterday, lookin' for cattle. Senorita, the strawberries are red."

She was sewing in the patio, her thought far from her fingers. She sprang to her feet. "Muchas gracias, Pedro, muchas gracias. We will have some. Saddle my pony."

Without an hour's delay—less than an hour—spent in a wild gallop into the hills, Carmen returned to her room and addressed a note to Senor Henry Bowie at New Helvetia.

"Strawberries are ripe." And with a strange thrill she signed it "Carmen." She dispatched it by Sanchez. He was to take horse and deliver it only to Senor Bowie; this upon his life.

When Bowie took the dainty note in hand he was surprised. Once opened, he could read it at a glance. But what did it imply? He thrilled at the signature. Certainly Carmen could not be engaged to marry the bald Spaniard. If she were she would never write him any sort of a message, much less one so cryptic as this.

The thrill of the woman who had sealed it tingled now in the veins of the man who read and reread it over and over.

"Sanchez," exclaimed Bowie suddenly, "say only this to Senorita Carmen. Be careful—say it when she is alone. Say: I hunger for strawberries."

Sanchez stared. The message was the strangest. But the shining gold coin laid in his hand was quite comprehensible. He repeated his lesson until Bowie was satisfied he had it straight and dismissed him. "Put up your horse and go get some supper. Start tomorrow morning at two o'clock. Ride fast or I shall overtake you. Tell Senorita I said this. But do you understand? Be careful no one hears you."

Late that night, long after the house was quiet, Carmen lay dreaming when she thought she heard a low voice without her window humming her Spanish air. "Go Ask the High Stars Gleaming." A delicious feeling crept over her as she lay and listened. She scrupled even to

listen—it seemed like forbidden fruit; but, like forbidden fruit, very sweet.

It was Henry Bowie, she knew for certain. None but a madman would have essayed that song on the rancho at midnight. He had ridden hard all day to sing late at night.

She sat up in bed and thought. Some acknowledgment she must make. She tiptoed stealthily to her dresser, found a candle, lighted it, and crept toward her window. All that Bowie saw was a white arm slowly extended and a lighted candle set cautiously within the pane. The singer no longer bespoke the favor of the high stars; a greater light quickened his heartbeats in that flame of the candle. And as he reached the end of a dim strain in his song the white arm once more reached forward, and the candle was put out to signify his dismissal.

There were surprises at Guadalupe next morning. Senor Bowie appeared, an unbidden guest, for breakfast. There was much laughter and joyous welcome at seeing him from all except Carmen. She was becoming reserved. But she could not altogether control the color that heightened in her cheeks so early.

"I just thought I'd drop down and see how things were running at



"If I kin it's yourn right off."

Guadalupe," said Bowie to Don Ramon, laughing, of course.

"It was awful of me to do what I did, senor," confessed Carmen when they were out in the sunshine together after breakfast and she was trying hard to control herself. "I just thought you'd like a merienda again. And this year I must be hostess for Guadalupe, and it's to run for several days."

"Isn't it lucky for me I'm here to help—if I may."

"It was awfully nice of you to protect me at breakfast, senor. It was a perfectly shameful thing for me to do—flying in the face of everything. No matter! Don Ramon and Dona Maria don't suspect the strawberries. Only faithful Sanchez has the secret."

"Our secret."

"I didn't say that. I am going to take Pedro and ride over to inspect the strawberries. Do you suppose I might find you over that way after a while?"

"Before you get there."

"You and I got terribly scolded that time I rode out with you early in the morning. We poor senoritas have to be so careful!" she said demurely.

"Look for me when you near the valley."

The Texan was as good as his word. When Carmen rode up to where he had halted, a look passed between them that only they understood.

The three rode together. As they approached the river Carmen pointed. "Do you see those two cabins across the Melena?"

Bowie looked. "I do see them. What are they?"

"Two uninvited neighbors of ours—Americanos, who have settled there."

"But that is on the rancho." "They seem to think our rancho is theirs. They are what you call squatters."

"They should be driven off. Does Don Ramon know?"

"He has been across there to see them. One of them is your old friend, Captain Blood. He pointed a rifle at Don Ramon and told him to get off his property or he would shoot him. And said, incidentally, there were too many greasers in this country, anyway."

Carmen spoke in the calm tone most calculated to arouse the anger of an honest man.

"If Don Ramon allowed that . . ." blurted out Bowie.

"He was unarmed. And he didn't want to get killed."

"But somebody's got to do something. These scoundrels will gobble the whole rancho piecemeal."

Carmen sighed. "Discouraging for the poor Spaniards," she said resignedly. "But the good God will do something for us. We are going too far, senor; let's turn this way to the valley. Does Guadalupe look very different to you from what it used to?"

At dinner the talk turned on the squatter problem already seriously agitating the owners of the ranchos about the bay region. The scum of camp followers, always ready to move and emboldened by Fremont's invasion, had spread over the land like noxious insects, devouring all in their path.

But Carmen's heart was set on the merienda, for the success of which she was accountable, and next morning she had a long list of things to be done in making ready for the picnic. Bowie was called on to such an extent that a more sophisticated man might have suspected she had sent for him chiefly to help her. The Texan, however, enjoyed his work hugely and, having wrung from Don Ramon the privilege of supplying the wine, made a trip to Monterey for some imported vintages and for those delicacies procurable only along the shipping front.

Carmen was startled next day when two carretas were unloaded at the rancho house. "Certainly," she said as she stood with Dona Maria and Bowie, watching the servants carry in supplies, "you Americanos are wonderful."

"But please remember, senorita, I am not an Americano. I am a Tejano. You said the merienda would last three days. And there will be some good eaters among our guests. There won't be much of all these things left to carry home."

It is sometimes more fun to get ready for a trip than to make the trip. Carmen, with her assistants, had a capital time getting ready for her picnic. The weather favored her, and the party set out from the rancho in high spirits; indeed, with the family, the servants and the vaqueros loaded with hampers, and the two carretas, the string of horses and riders looked like a cavalcade. It was led by Senorita Carmen, attended this time by Bowie.

As was befitting, they were early on the ground—among the first—and a busy morning went to making all ready and greeting new arrivals. Following the annual custom, the first dinner late in the day was a gala affair before settling down, ostensibly at least, to the work of gathering strawberries.

Don Ramon presided at the first table with his Dona and Senorita as hostesses. Henry Bowie and a few special guests sat with them. The dinner was featured by game provided by Guadalupe vaqueros. Bowie complimented the hostess on its variety.

"I was lucky," she confessed to him in an aside. "Sanchez brought in practically all of it—the venison and elk and the quail and pigeons—all in two days. Sanchez is the best hunter on the rancho."

Carmen was walking on air. Her face reflected every emotion a happy hour could awaken: low bubbling laughter; natural color deepened by pleasure and excitement; quips and retorts rolling from a ready tongue; teeth and eyes that flashed together.

And when the wines were served, her guests at the tables under the trees sang with extraordinary fervor a drinking song punctuated by the popping of corks and the clinking of glasses. In fact, Bowie's wines proved equal to inspiring more than one drinking song. And as the dinner progressed, the senoritas raised their glasses with the caballeros to augment the choruses.

In the midst of this hilarity and the final moments of the parting day a clatter of hoofs was heard among the more distant pines. At least, it was heard by the ears of a frontiersman trained by many surprises to catch unusual sounds.

In the fewest possible moments a horseman, galloping up to the nearest table, threw himself from the saddle. The drooping head of the pony, his desperate panting, the froth that flecked his chest and dropped from his muzzle, the nervous champing at the bit, all told the story of a grueling ride. The dismounted rider lifted his hat and looked, dismayed and inquiringly, among the revelers as if searching for someone. Bowie rose from his seat at the table.

"Pedro!" he called, raising his hand.

"Senor Bowie!" exclaimed the vaquero with relief. "Please! Will you speak with me?" The vaquero walked rapidly beyond earshot of the tables, the Texan following him.

"What is it, Pedro?" asked Bowie. "What has happened?"

"Senor Bowie—Sanchez!"

"What about him?"

"He has been murdered." (TO BE CONTINUED) Carmen of the Rancho—39

THE CHEERFUL CHERUB

It doesn't do to work too hard—
So soon we hear the final call
When I consider that I think
It doesn't do to work at all.
R.T.C.

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A General Quiz

The Questions

1. What is the rule of noblesse oblige?
2. What is the opposite of prolix?
3. What workman used a cant hook?
4. A horsepower is equal to how many watts?
5. How many deadly sins are listed?
6. What is the tallest living animal?
7. How much does a presidential inauguration cost?

The Answers

1. Rank imposes obligation.
2. Concise.
3. A lumberman (for turning logs).
4. One horsepower equals 746 watts.
5. Seven: Pride, covetousness, lust, anger, gluttony, envy and sloth.
6. The giraffe (the males sometimes attain a height of 18 feet).
7. The cost has varied from time to time. Congress appropriated \$35,000 for 1941 inaugural expenses—about \$7,000 less than was expended in 1937.

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Shadows of Mind

The shadows of the mind are like those of the body. In the morning of life they lie behind us; at noon, we trample them under foot; and in the evening they stretch long, broad and deepening behind us.—Longfellow.

1836 Map Heirloom

P. A. Norton of Elyria, Ohio, has a copy of Mitchell's map of Ohio, Indiana, Illinois and Michigan which was published in Philadelphia in 1836. It is a folding map that was owned by his grandfather who came to Ohio when this country was still largely inhabited by Indians.

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With Friends

They are never alone that are accompanied with noble thoughts.—Sir Philip Sidney.

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