

# CARMEN OF THE RANCHO

By FRANK H. SPEARMAN

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WNU Service

## CHAPTER XVI—Continued

They had ridden miles and miles before Carmen slackened pace and looked over with a laugh at her companion. "Oh, I haven't had so glorious a run since—I can't remember when. Not, anyway, since you left Guadalupe. My poor pony—I must breathe him." They walked the horses. A dell opened on one side of the trail they were following.

Bowie pointed. "That's a lush stand of grass over there. Shall we let the ponies nibble a bit?" "They deserve it, don't you think?" "I think whatever you think, senorita."

"What nonsense!" Carmen drew herself up in her saddle. "I believe I'm tired. Where's poor Pedro? Oh, he's coming, isn't he? We did ride fast. There seemed to be something inside me just urging me to speed on. Funny, isn't it, how impulses act?"

"If you are tired let's get down a moment. I think your cinches are giving a little, anyway," he added hypocritically. "Who hooked you up?" "Felix. I think it was."

When he asked his inconsequential question—for words were spoken now only to conceal thoughts—he was on his feet, waiting to take her down from the saddle. She slipped into his arms, neither too freely nor too restrainedly, but inevitably, for an instant, into his arms. That instant was to plunge both into an ocean whose waters had been dreamed of but never before felt.

She drew back almost guiltily as she smoothed her riding skirt and, without looking directly at him, murmured a thank you. When she saw him throw the lines of the ponies, and they began cropping, her heart beat faster: he meant to linger a while.

Pedro rode slowly up. "Pedro," said Bowie, "ride up to the Melena and look about for any bogged cows before the squatters get them. If we do not follow you look for us here on your way back."

As the vaquero spurred off, Carmen sat down on the grass with a pleasing sweep of her voluminous skirt, took off her hat and let the sea breeze play through her hair. "See!" she exclaimed, pointing as he threw himself on the ground beside her. "There's the boy. Isn't it gorgeous! I don't think I ever found this nook before."

"Senorita," he said, plucking a blade of grass and paying no attention to her words, "something you said at dinner last night set me thinking."

"How could anything I might say set you thinking, Senor Tajano?" she asked, plucking a blade of grass herself.

"You said you could now ride without fear of being carried off. Why should you feel afraid of such a thing? Surely you don't think these miserable squatters would dare do that?"

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, senior, 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, Senor 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, Senor 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, senior. Shouldn't you be? Senor 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, senior, perhaps better than you think," she continued, "I felt it would be well to talk first to Senor 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. Senor Bowie, you are the man."

"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 on me 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

ring 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 guerrillas, 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 guerrillas 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 festa; 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 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." (TO BE CONTINUED)



"I remember."

**AROUND THE HOUSE**

Do not move bread dough after it begins to rise, or it is likely to fall. Select a spot, out of a draft, for the bowl. Cover with a cloth and then let the dough alone.

If you sprinkle a little flour in the grease in which you are to fry eggs, croquettes, etc., the grease will not splutter.

Any flaked ready-to-serve cereal may be used instead of bread crumbs in a recipe that calls for bread crumbs.

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## 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 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