



# CARMEN OF THE RANCHO

By FRANK H. SPEARMAN

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## CHAPTER XII—Continued

"Well—if you say so, Padre—so be it," replied Bowie.

The priest rose. "I will give you absolution. I will perform your penance for you. And whatever happens, you will be ready. Good-by, my son. You now truly are my son." He raised his wrinkled hand, expressed the symbol of eternity above him, and spoke low and rapidly the serious words of absolution.

Again the lumbering footsteps were heard in the corridor. "Come!" shouted the guard, unlocking and opening the door. It would have been so easy, thought Bowie, to have knocked him down.

"I am ready, amigo." Speaking placatingly, the padre stepped into the corridor and walked away.

As darkness fell Bowie stood close to the peephole, watching for the padre to pass in the corridor. He was no longer anxious to finish the tunnel, feeling sure that he could take Sanchez with him.

A hooded figure passed Bowie's cell and, without pausing, walked down the corridor. The Texan tipped back to his stool and sat down to listen.

Hour after hour passed in the cell, with Bowie straining his ears and senses to hear the whistle which should tell him the horses had come. Sanchez stealthily appeared at the cell door and unlocked it. Bowie drew him in for a whispered confidence.

"Two horses will soon be left behind the guardhouse. I wait for them."

"Why two?"  
 "You are going with me."  
 "Me?"  
 "Yes, you. Do you want to be shot? When you hear the whistle, come back and we will start."  
 Sanchez hesitated. "Hark! the signal," whispered Bowie. "I will wait for you at the horses. Work fast."

The Texan curbed his nervous apprehension as well as he could. Slinking around to the rear of the jail, he found the horses, their heads roped together. They stood quiet and Bowie, after patting them, walked back to the guardroom.

"Sanchez," whispered Bowie in the dark, "can you find me a knife or a pistol?"

"Here are both, senior. And I have one each for myself; and powder and lead."

"Then you are ready?"

"Ready, senior."

"Listen. Before I go back to the horses I will leave my compliments to Pico. Take your keys and unlock every door along the corridor."

"Senior!"

"Exactly—every door. Give every man his chance to get away from this Mexican scoundrel. Make haste."

Bowie returned to the horses. He loosed them and awaited Sanchez, who lost no time in rejoining him. The horses' feet were muffled, and the two mounted men, riding with extreme care and with Sanchez for guide, made their escape without an alarm being sounded. Working east by north, daybreak found them well into the first range of mountains to the east of the presidio.

"We are well out of that rascal's reach, Sanchez," said Bowie. "The question now is: what do we want to do? I am on my way to Texas. Do you want to come along?"

"Texas, senior? Where is that?"

"A long way—six, seven sleeps if no trouble on the way. If trouble, no one can say how many sleeps. Sometimes bad Indians; sometimes lose the way. Wide deserts, high mountains, deep rivers. But I crossed them once. I can do it again. While we rest, think it over. If you want to come with me, I will take the best care I can of you."

Warmed by the sun, breakfasted, and fatigued by the excitement and strain of the escape, Bowie stretched before the dying fire and fell asleep. While he napped Sanchez sat drawing figures in the sandy soil with bits of sticks.

Bowie woke and rose to his feet. "Sanchez," he asked, "what do you say? What do you want to do?"

The Indian's mind was made up. "Senior," he said respectfully, "I think it better for me to stay in my own country. I will go back to Rancho Guadalupe."

Bowie could hardly have believed, until he heard them, how sharply the words would cut him. Guadalupe! What that meant to him! What moments of sheer happiness, what dreams buoyant with life, what memories of snow-capped peaks, challenging storms, delectable sunshine! What peace at an evening fireside, with a presence near, while he hoarded, miserlike, within his breast the silent treasure of his dreams!

Then the rude awakening! The stinging wound, the crushing realization that his castle dreams had vanished. Guadalupe indeed!

He nodded slowly in response to Sanchez' decision. "Perhaps it is better so. Yes, I am sure it is. These are your friends. They will welcome you, Sanchez. You are wise."

In parting, Sanchez gave to Bowie the flint and tinder and the salt.

"But what will you do?"

"I will stop at Mission San Gabriel. The padres will give me

these. Take, senior, the powder and ball."

"Sanchez, I will not forget you."

"But you will come back?"

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In California itself he had been forced to realize how futile any such effort must be. Much greater nations—the ambitious Americans, the perennially grasping British, the Black-bearded Russians, the easy-going Spaniards and the thrice-stupid Mexicans—were all striving to land in their laps the prize of the world—California.

And now after ten years the republic of Texas was no more. A new crop of politicians had sprung up. The warriors of Texas were gone, or their counsels were sneered at. The slaveholders of the United States were plotting to add the vast territory of the little republic to the slaveholding states, and they now controlled the sentiment of Texas. Ysabel was right!

It took some time for Bowie to get all this clear in his head. But the clearer the intrigue became, the deeper grew his disgust for the annexationists who were seated in the political saddles.

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To Bowie such men were all in all. His concerns were their concerns, his feuds, their feuds; his enemies, their enemies. Bowie loved his cowboys; they loved him—proved it through storm and stress.

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## CHAPTER XIII

Rancho Guadalupe was not quiet during the year following Bowie's departure. Political disturbances marked the period throughout California. Rival Mexican factions were in motion most of the time. Fremont, increasingly bold, had enlarged the scope of his depredations. Commodore Stockton had not as yet told him bluntly where he belonged.

Pardaloe and Simmie, deserted by Bowie, felt the wanderlust and resigned at Guadalupe to betake themselves to Sanchez's where, as hunters and riflemen, they were welcomed by the energetic Swiss.

If there had been lingering, after Bowie's departure from Guadalupe, a penumbra of the reputation that his presence had established at the rancho, it faded completely when his scouts left. Minor marauders had heretofore steered clear of the noted hacienda, since the Tejanos were known to visit swift and severe punishment on any who ran off horses or cattle. The wild Tulares, the Mexican rovers and the wandering Americans had long been content to do their pillaging elsewhere.