



# CARMEN OF THE RANCHO

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

## CHAPTER I

The site of the rancho could not have been more happily chosen. For miles the landscape lay like a park in gently rolling hills and wide-spreading valleys. The soil was carpeted with nutritious grasses for Don Alfredo's herds, and nature provided for spring and summer an un-failing profusion of wild flowers that turned the broad fields into a riot of purple and gold, imperial in beauty. Overlooking this inviting prospect rose the wooded foothills, like the frame of a picture, dignified in the distance by the heights of the majestic Sierras.

The ranch house had been built on an elevation that commanded a view of both the ocean and the hill country.

Don Alfredo had developed the rancho and built the ranch house to welcome his Spanish bride, now Dona Juana, the mother of his children, two little girls of six and eight years and one older brother. Dona Juana had brought from Spain the culture and traditions of Spanish centuries, and at the presidio in San Diego, in the gatherings at the rancho, or when a more formal festivity called for a baile in town Dona Juana was notable among beautiful women for gaiety and charm.

In her necessarily crude California surroundings, far from the stately repose of Estramadura and Madrid, Dona Juana confessed to only one feeling of uneasiness: that was what her devoted Don Alfredo termed an "unreasonable" fear of mountain Indians, who at long intervals made forays on the ranches to steal horses.

It was only gradually that she overcame this fear. But the sunshine and the peace of her immediate surroundings, the care she devoted to her children and the always affectionate solicitude of her husband, were powerful sedatives for her peace of mind.

It was thus that the years of motherhood passed for Dona Juana. Her own maid was an alert mission Indian named Monica. Monica, like her mistress, was of an apprehensive temperament; she had even less confidence in the Sierra Indians than Dona Juana herself.

The older of the two girls had grown to be eight when her mother made ready for a little house party, a valecito casero. On the day before the invitations were sent out by messenger, Monica came to her mistress with disquieting news. Dona Juana was seated in the patio facing the garden. The two children were gathering flowers.

The elder ran to her mother with a pretty bloom and a question. "What is this one, Madre mia?"

"That, Carmelita, is a Mariposa, a beautiful flower. I am glad you found one."

Before Teresa, the younger girl, could bring a rival for her sister's posy Monica came running down from the house. She ignored her pets, the little girls, and spoke in low tones to her mistress.

Dona Juana started. "Where did you hear this?" she asked.

"From Manuelo, the cook. You know, senora, he has a boy, Yosco. I do not trust that boy. Manuelo is honest—he has warned us before. I think Yosco gets his news secretly from a renegade mission Indian and tells his father."

"When does Manuelo say the attack will take place?"

"He does not know—but soon."

Dona Juana left Monica with the children and returned to the house. She found Don Alfredo in his office, cleaning his carbine for a hunt.

"Alfredo," said his wife, "Monica tells me an Indian outbreak is coming. You know, they always attack the outlying ranches first. Monica thinks we should go in at once to the presidio, Alfredo, and stay till the danger is over."

Don Alfredo showed impatience. "Monica is always bringing some cock-and-bull story about an attack. She had the same story a year ago, and there was no attack."

"True, Alfredo. But we learned afterward they were frightened away by the bonfires Don Santiago built and by the noise he made."

Her husband scoffed. "And are these the savages we are to run away from, who are scared by bonfires and by the noise Don Santiago makes at Tia Juana when he is half drunk? It is nonsense, Juana; pay no attention to these old wives' tales." But Don Alfredo's assurance did not set his wife's forebodings at rest. She abandoned her plans for the house party.

On the evening of the following Saturday—Monica's first alarm had come on Monday—the Indian woman came to her mistress and Don Alfredo, begging them to heed her. With tears in her eyes she told them the Indians would surely attack. She urged that they leave at once for the presidio and safety. Dona Juana was so seriously affected by the threat of danger to her children that her husband reluctantly consented to go to the presidio until the threatened danger had passed.

Sunday morning, after a hurried breakfast and with all preparations for departure made, Don Alfredo, with two vaqueros, went down to the corral. They were lassoing horses for the trip when they heard a yell that split the air. It was the

war whoop of the Sierra Indians, riding at breakneck pace out of the hills.

Naked or half-naked, they dashed helter-skelter down on the ranch house, yelling and beating their ponies. Don Alfredo and the two vaqueros were caught at the corral gate. Realizing their deadly peril, they ran on foot toward the ranch house for muskets. They hoped that the marauders might stop first at the corral to run off horses. But the Indians were after more than horses.

Despite the speed of their pursuers the frantic Spaniard and his fleet cowboys, each of them already hit but not disabled, by murderous arrows, managed, breathless, to make the front door of the house. Don Alfredo sprang at the thumb latch to throw open the door.

He gave a loud cry. The door was barred from the inside. He raised his voice in a mighty shout, his companions joining in. With only seconds left before the yelling horsemen should be upon them the three desperate men threw themselves with all their force against the barred door—in vain. It had been the boast of the Rancho Los Alamos that no foe, however powerful, could break through that door.

Only a moment of life was left to the distracted Don to wonder, amazed, at why his own door had been thus barred against him. The next moment he and his men lay on the porch, shot through and through with arrows. The foremost of their pursuers, springing from ponies, were already astride their victims, hacking their bodies with knives as they glutted their fury and grunted at each stab into the bodies of their dying victims.

In less time than the telling, it was over. The brown tile of the portico was a shambles. The savages, frenzied with triumph, dragged the bodies from the door, and the chief, his hands dripping with the blood of Don Alfredo, pounded on the door and shouted in his Indian tongue.

The door was promptly flung open. The savages, rushing into the house, rap to the bedrooms. There were four. The Indian houseboy, Yosco, who had barred the door to his master, opened it to the murderers and pointed with eager, cunning eyes to the room of Don Alfredo.

Within the room there were more whites to be butchered. Don Alfredo's wife, clasping in each arm a young daughter, was on her knees before a pitying statue of the Blessed Virgin, calling distractedly for protection. The chief dashed toward her. His hatchet was uplifted to cleave her skull when, shrieking aloud, Monica, the Indian maid, dashed through the crowding warriors and seized the chief's arm.

He turned and struck her to the floor with his fist. Before he could turn again and bring his hatchet on the Dona's head Monica had sprung to her feet and grasping his enraged arm, pleaded for her mistress's life. He struck her off and turned again, with hatchet uplifted. But the two screaming little girls clasped their arms about their mother's head.

The infuriated butcher tried to tear them away. They screamed the more and clung the closer to their mother. Monica once more threw herself upon the savage. The lust for killing momentarily passed. The beauty in the uplifted, terror-stricken faces of the girls gave him another thought. He thrust the panting Monica away, ordered the mother of the girls bound and, with the savages who had crowded after him, ran from room to room, searching for more victims.

Every corner of the premises was searched till the hidden guns and powder of the rancho were found, and these, with many grunts and yells, were taken out of doors for the chief. Wines and brandies were discovered. With bottles and demijohns to their mouths the attackers poured fiery potions down their throats, grabbing the bottles from one another until they were staggering around in every stage of drunkenness.

The chief grew even more vicious

in his cups. He ordered the frantic girls torn from their mother's arms and carried to his ponies. Again he sought to kill Dona Juana, and again Monica, who could not be wrenched from her mistress, prevented the murder, offering her own life to appease the drunken rage of the captor.

As the liquor worked on the savage his senses reeled increasingly, and as if glutted with bloodshed, he ordered the Dona stripped of her clothing and driven from the house. In the interval the buildings had all been gutted, and, capering before the house, the drunken savage arrayed in Don Alfredo's hat ordered the ranch buildings burned.

Fires were set. Flames were soon rising in every direction. Drunken Indians danced about the flames and shot arrows into the burning houses; others, mounting, made ready to run off the horses from the corral. The chief, securing the two fainting girls on a spare pony headed for the mountains, hardly looked back at the complete ruin of what,



Drunken Indians danced about.

three hours before, had been the famed Rancho Los Alamos.

Monica, her shriveled features streaming with grief, had crept down to the river after her mistress had been stripped of her clothing. Hidden under her arm, she carried a dress. Escaping the roaming eyes of the marauding savages, she worked her way stealthily down along the river, keeping under the shelving bank until the ranch house and Indians were out of sight.

Leaving the river bed, she hurried through a field of barley that partly hid her from sight until she reached the trail to town and, turning into this, ran at top speed. It was along this trail that she knew she must look for her mistress.

Monica had not far to seek for the unhappy Dona. She lay partly on her face in the hollow within which she had striven to hide her terrible plight. The devoted maid cried out as she ran to her, dropping to her knees and hugging the trembling body in her arms while she wet it with tears. She spoke to the hardly conscious woman. The Dona's wealth of golden hair swept over her shoulders down to her waist, as if in protest against the outrageous treatment inflicted on her and to protect so far as it might her outraged sensibilities. Her half-closed eyes, as Monica turned her face upward and begged pathetically for a word of recognition, gave no answer to the weeping maid. The lips of her mistress did indeed move, but only in incoherent mutterings.

With the superhuman strength of the Indian, Monica succeeded in getting the protection of the dress she carried on her mistress's quivering form and laid her tenderly back, staring with meaningless eyes into the cloudless sky.

Monica herself, wild with despair, began again to pray, her arms lifted toward heaven as was her mistress'

went. Only a few minutes had passed when she saw a youth riding up toward the rancho. She sprang to her feet. She knew the figure, screamed, and, as the lad turned toward her, waved her arms frantically.

It was young Alfredo, the pet of the Rancho Los Alamos, tall and fine for his twelve years, son and heir of his father.

"Alfredo," she cried, "come quick! I am Monica! Quick, quick!" He ran to her. As he stared, dismayed at the sight of his unconscious mother, Monica clasped him in her arms. Hardly had the word "Indians!" passed her lips when, flinging down his gun, he threw himself on the breast of his mother, raining kisses on her closed eyes and calling to her passionately to speak.

Monica, kneeling beside him, told the boy in broken sentences of the fearful tragedy of the brief hour after he had left the rancho to hunt quail in the near-by foothills.

She cut short Alfredo's frantic grief. "Now," she exclaimed, "you must be a man, Alfredo! As fast as you can, run to the presidio for help. Send the soldiers! Quick! Quick!"

"But my sisters? Tell me!"

"Gone, Alfredo! The Indians have stolen them. The soldiers! The soldiers! Make haste! Help me save your mother."

## CHAPTER II

The morning sun was high, but the padre in his brown woolen habit plodded steadily on, sustained by the thought that Rancho Los Alamos could now be only a little way ahead. There, he promised himself, he would find rest, a little refreshment and some pleasant conversation with Don Alfredo and his lovely wife, Dona Juana, before he continued his southward journey with the patient Indian neophyte now trudging by his side.

Hardly had the pleasurable thought crossed his mind when the neophyte halted and, cupping his left hand above his eyes, looked toward the hills beyond the river.

Padre Vicente Pasqual paused. "What do you see, Diego?"

"Smoke, Padre."

"What smoke? I see none."

Diego pointed. "Across the river. Toward Alamos. Smoke."

"Your eyes are younger than mine, Diego. I see no smoke."

White spirals of smoke were rising lazily and swaying dreamily in the hot sunshine.

"It is smoke," repeated the Indian solemnly.

"There is no matanza, nothing to cause smoke at Los Alamos. But we shall soon be there. Lower your pack a moment and rest your shoulders."

"I am not weary, Padre. Let us go on."

Curiosity was stronger than a sense of fatigue with the Indian. He quickened his pace. Smoke at Los Alamos—Diego said no more, but he thought much.

Just before the ranch buildings of Los Alamos were to come into view Diego stood still. "I am afraid, Padre," he said slowly, "we shall see the work of bad Indians at Los Alamos."

"What do you mean, my son?"

"Bad Indians."

"Yes, but what?"

They followed the trail through a field of wheat. "Look," Diego pointed. The ruins of Rancho Los Alamos were in full view. Padre Pasqual stared in amazement and grief. His staff dropped from his grasp. His hands parted in horror.

"Merciful God!" he cried in agony. "What has been here?" He fell on his knees, and, with face uplifted and eyes sightless, prayer poured from his trembling lips.

It was some moments before he could compose himself. He held out a hand for Diego's help—the padre's knees were old—and, regaining his feet beside the silent Indian, took from his hand the crude staff. "We must hasten, Diego, hasten," he exclaimed unsteadily. "Why do you hesitate—why?"

(TO BE CONTINUED)

## AROUND the HOUSE Items of Interest to the Housewife

Wall outlets for electrical devices used in the kitchen, pantry or butler's pantry should be placed at table height. This permits the use of shorter cords with cooking utensils, eliminating coils that are likely to get in the housewife's way.

Cakes or cookies in which honey is used as a sweetening require a rather moderate temperature for baking. If the oven is too hot they will burn.

Don't bang porcelain or enameled kitchen equipment against stoves, tables or sinks. It will chip or crack if it is roughly handled. Many of the more modern, attractive pieces require special care.

Standing on a heavy rug or rubber mat will go a long way toward preventing fatigue during long periods of ironing.

Ice cubes or desserts are frozen faster in a mechanical refrigerator if a quarter-cup of water is poured on the freezing surface before the trays are put in place.

Cloths saturated with polishing liquids if stored away in a closet often cause spontaneous combustion. Keep these cloths in a covered tin container.

To prolong the life of a large rug, shift it around every six weeks or so. This prevents constant wear on those sections covering the most-traveled part of the room.



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