

CARMEN OF THE RANCHO

By FRANK H. SPEARMAN © Frank H. Spearman 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 inconsequent 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 bay. 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 Tejano?" 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?"

She was silent so long that he looked up at her for an answer. When she spoke her expression had completely changed. She was serious. "Shall I tell you?" she asked in a tone quite new to him.

"Why not?" he said simply.

"When I was a child," she said, "a dreadful tragedy came into my life. First I must tell you, senor, I am not the daughter of Dona Maria and Don Ramon. Dona Maria is my aunt. My real father's rancho near San Diego was raided one dreadful day by Indians. They murdered my father and would have murdered my mother, had it not been for the plea of her Indian maid, Monica. As it was, the agony and terror that Mother suffered that day killed her within a few weeks. There were three of us children left orphans: an older brother, my younger sister Teresita, and myself. My brother was not at home and so escaped. The Indians set fire to the ranch house and carried my sister and myself away with them into the mountains."

"My sister and I were at the mercy of the savages. I don't remember much of this—I was too young, and I was insane with terror. I do seem to remember a stormy night, a terrible fight, and being snatched up with my sister and carried away by other Indians—at least I thought them such. But both Teresita and I were so far gone we knew little of what went on about us."

"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. Teresita 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, senor, 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, senor. 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, senor, 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."

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?"

"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

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's got a special spite against 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 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 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."

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, Senor 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 questioningly, 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 forgotten 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 squatters—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 spur-



"I remember."



"SCHOOL DAZE, SCHOOL DAZE"
The public schools have opened again and millions of children give up playing outdoors and start fooling in the schoolroom.

They had a lot of fun during the vacation, but weren't anywhere near as idle as they will be when they get back to their studies.

Whether the children have been getting the right sort of education is now a question agitating many nations. That many of the weaknesses in social systems are due to emphasis on the wrong things in school is widely charged. France declares, through Marshal F. Stalin, that its public school system was "a lie," and says that from now on schools will teach "respect of the human individual, the family, society and the nation."

France has blamed about everything else for its defeat, and it may be stretching a point to blame the schools, but this department thinks a little shaking up of the American public school system wouldn't do us any harm.

If Uncle Sam's schools are teaching American boys and girls respect for the family, society and the nation, a lot of the kids are not listening. (There we go preaching again.)

How about getting back to the old-fashioned days when school was

opened with prayer and the national anthem, with teachers supplying the inspiration?

The schools are instructing the kids in dates that don't matter, historical episodes that they will never remember and various subjects which will be of little use to 'em. The only exam they pass quickly is the one which asks, "What was Jimmy Cagney's last picture?" "Name four night clubs most often mentioned in the press." "What six movie stars were divorced in the last 10 days?" and "Has mommer developed a system to beat bingo yet?"

The three Rs would seem to be Robinson, Rooney and Romero.

Of course, the schools may not be entirely to blame for the fact that little boys grow up into men who yawn as a veterans' parade passes, give a sloppy salute to Old Glory and say "So what!" when told that democracy is in danger.

The old folks at home have something to do with it. Pop never read the Declaration of Independence, and thinks Magna Charta is a new screen actress.

And mom is too busy between bridge, the screen scandals, bingo and her efforts to get the right face cream that she isn't much help to the kids either. (So we hear.)

FRATERNITY BROTHERS
"I'll take him on!" cries Paul McNutt.
Says Wendell, "Paul, my eye!"—Biff! Bang! They're merely brothers in Old Beta Theta Pi.

RIMES IN HEAVY TRAFFIC
Shed a tear for Margie White. She signaled left . . . and then turned right. —A. G. Odell.

Bandaged up is Gus Q. Bray—He said he'd fix his brakes "some day." —K. L. T.

Gatti Casazza died in Italy the other day at 71. He had been director of the Metropolitan Opera in New York for 27 years, and before that was director at La Scala. Gatti was a glamorous figure in the days when the world not only felt like singing, but sang and even paid money to hear others sing. He must have been pretty unhappy lately.

Kathryn Hohlman Frank defines an optimist as a man who kept his sunglasses in his hand during the last two weeks in August.

The explanation of the hour: He was going to get married anyhow this summer.

The new France is talking of adopting the "family vote" system of franchise, under which a man has as many votes as there are in his immediate family. The French have something there that we might copy on this side of the ocean. Imagine the rush of party leaders to take Pap Dionne to the polls!

New York has a new milk-bottle, shorter, lighter and "gurgle proof" whatever that may mean. If it still holds notes to the milkman it is okay with us.

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