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 unfailing 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 baille 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 ranchos 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 ranchos 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, ran 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' 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' 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' wont. 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)

Introducing . . .

Frank H. Spearman's

CARMEN OF THE RANCHO

Yes, today is the day you meet the spirited Carmen, Spanish heroine of this great Western love story. And today is the day you also meet youthful Henry Bowie, Texas pioneer scout, who one day comes to love the gracious senorita. And you will meet Bowie's inseparable companions, the lanky Missourian, Ben Paradole, and Simmie, the faithful Indian guide. And today in the very opening chapter you'll thrill to the first of many exciting adventures that will hold your interest in the weeks to come.

★ ★ ★

START IT TODAY—READ EVERY CHAPTER

HOW TO SEW

by Ruth Wyeth Spears

EVERY Homemaker knows how many steps could be saved if table linens could have a special closet in the kitchen or pantry. In one home that we know of space for such a closet was going to waste all because cupboard doors or drawers would conflict with the door shown here in the small sketch. At the right you see how that space became an efficient linen closet after all—complete even to a smart laundry bag for soiled napkins and table covers.

The high compartment has a door of plywood. Below this are shelves with a curtain on a shade roller. The curtain runs up and down between the shelves and the scalloped board that frames the closet, as shown at the left. This board is ½ inch thick and four inches wide. The scallops were marked by drawing around a teacup and were cut out with a jig saw. I want to tell you how the laundry bag is made too. Watch for it, next week.

• • •

NOTE: As a service to our readers Mrs. Spears has prepared a series of homemaking booklets. No. 5, just published, contains 32 pages of clever ideas fully illustrated and a description of the other numbers. To get your copy send order to:

MRS. RUTH WYETH SPEARS
Drawer 10
Bedford Hills New York

Enclose 10 cents for Book 5.

Name .....

Address .....

ASK ME ANOTHER ?

A Quiz With Answers Offering Information on Various Subjects

The Questions

1. How long was a round of boxing when John L. Sullivan ruled the ring?
2. How long was Abraham Lincoln President before the Civil war broke out?
3. What is the largest stadium in America?
4. What universities compete for the Little Brown Jug on the gridiron each year?
5. What is a Pyrrhic victory?
6. Does each star in the American flag represent a particular state?
7. Do kangaroos ever roost in trees?
8. Do the Japanese ever say "no"?
9. Do the Basques speak French or Spanish?
10. Where is the deepest underground restaurant in the world?

The Answers

1. Until one of the fighters scored a knockdown over his opponent
2. Six weeks.
3. Soldier field, located in Chicago, Illinois, takes this honor. Its seating capacity will handle a crowd of 125,000 persons.
4. The University of Michigan at Ann Arbor, and the University of Minnesota at Minneapolis.
5. One gained at too great a cost.
6. No, the stars represent the states collectively, not individually.
7. Australia boasts of kangaroos that roost in trees. They are clumsy climbers, but have remarkable jumping powers and a tenacious grip. A family of tree kangaroos will frequently use one tree for their permanent abode.
8. No. And they never say "yes" as these two words do not exist in their language. If you asked a Japanese if he wanted something, he would reply, "I do," or "I do not."
9. The Basques, who live in the north of Spain and in the south of France, speak neither French nor Spanish. They use a language whose source still puzzles philologists.
10. It is said to be the one in the Carlsbad caverns in New Mexico, which is located 700 feet below ground. Because of the chilly temperature of 56 degrees throughout the year, the coffee cups have to be preheated. One thousand persons can be served at one time in the cafeteria.

EXTRA MILDNESS
EXTRA COOLNESS
EXTRA FLAVOR

In recent laboratory tests, Camels burned 25% *slower* than the average of the 15 other of the largest-selling brands tested—slower than *any* of them. That means, on the average, a smoking *plus* equal to 5 EXTRA SMOKES PER PACK!

GET THE "EXTRAS" WITH SLOWER-BURNING

CAMELS

THE CIGARETTE OF COSTLIER TOBACCOS

MERCHANTS

Your Advertising Dollar

buys something more than space and circulation in the columns of this newspaper. It buys space and circulation plus the favorable consideration of our readers for this newspaper and its advertising patrons.

LET US TELL YOU MORE ABOUT IT