CARMEN OF THE RANCHO

By FRANK H. SPEARMAN

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SYNOPSIS

Don Alfredo, wealthy, Spanish owner of a Southern California rancho, refuses to heed several warnings of a raid by a band of outlaw, Sierra Indians. One day after he has finally decided to seek the protection of the nearby mission for his wife and family, the Indians strike. Don Alfredo is killed and his two young daughters are torn from the arms of the family's faithful maid, Monica, and are carried away to the hills. Padre Pasqual, missionary friend of the family, arrives at the ruins of the ranch and learns the story of the raid from Monica. After a trying and difficult trip across the plains and mountains from Texas to California youthful Henry Bowie, a Texas adventurer, with his friends, Ben Pardaloe and Simmie, an Indian scout, sight the party of Indians who have carried off the two little girls. With great cunning and accurate timing the three Texans attack the war party of fifty-odd Indians and through a clever ruse scatter the savages to the hills. The girls are saved but are still thoroughly frightened.

CHAPTER IV—Continued

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The result was magical. The rigid, fear-bound expression of the child's features brightened instantly to one of understanding. The suspicious eyes softened. This gesture was at least one she could comprehend. A timid smile gradually spread over her face.

"I believe she understands," said Bowie.

She allowed him to put the cup to her lips, drank lightly but gratefully, looking up at him wonderingly between swallows. Her thirst was apparent. Then she spoke to her sister as Bowie supposed her to be. With her cruelly stiffened arm she offered the water to her. The little one, drinking ravenously, finished the cup. Simmie ran to the stream and refilled it, and the two girls emptied a second cupful. They tasted sparingly of the venison, but they ate, and afterward the two pitiful refugees rode with the formidably bearded Texans down the long reaches of the foothill slopes.

After three days of riding they stumbled on a thing that gave them cheer; they pulled up their horses before a traveled way under their feet—a plainly marked trail that ran almost at right angles to the direction in which they were riding. Though it was winding along the plain, across desert and over hills, this was, quite unknown to them, the highway of the king, linking, up and down the stretches of the coast, the missions that had brought to California authentic Christianity.

They debated as to which way they should turn—north or south. It was a question only to be answered by another: Where were they? None of the three had the vaguest idea. Bowie knew he wanted to get to Monterey—that was all. Evidences of cultivated fields lay to the south, so for the south they headed.

Toward nightfall they found themselves approaching something like a rancho. They quickened their pace, for thin streamers of smoke curled vaguely from what might be a house. Their surprise and disappointment was cruel when, reaching the crest of a rise, they saw in the fading light that the smoke rose from the ruins of a habitation.

The little charges, carried by Bowie and the long-legged Pardaloe, had succumbed to the heat and fatigue of the long day's ride, and both were asleep on the breasts of their rescuers. Between the adventurers and ruins lay a river. Along the bed, almost dry, a slender stream trickled through margins of cress and rushes. The horses stopped without invitation to slake their thirst. Chaparral fringed the farther bank of the stream, and from this thicket there came a sudden cry.

It awoke the elder girl. She raised her head. Again a cry, almost a shriek, came from the undergrowth. The girl in Bowie's arms cried out in return. The bushes across the river parted and a woman stood forth.

Bowie had hardly time to inspect her before his charges called again to the woman in a frenzy of joy. "Monica! Monica!"

The woman was a strange-looking creature. Her gaunt face was framed by thin streams of disordered hair, falling on her shoulders. A scant gown covered her emaciated figure. But when she heard the high, plaintive cry from the little girls she quivered. Her outstretched arms flew up and down. "Carmelita!" she screamed, "Terecita, is it you?" The hurried words in Spanish were not understood by the greatly surprised Tejanos. Now the little girl broke into a volley of responses—her tongue was loosed. She spoke so fast that Bowie laughed as he listened.

CHAPTER V

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"Who are these men?" asked the Indian woman looking suspiciously at the horsemen.

"I don't know," piped the little one. "They brought us away from the bad Indians, Monica. Many wicked Indians are killed. Where are my mother and father?"

"Where is your sister, Carmelita?" the woman asked hysterically.

"She is here."

"Mother of Mercy," sobbed the woman, "I thank you."

The horses had taken the water allowed them. The Texans rode into the river, and Monica ran down to meet them; the two girls, crying hard, held out their arms frantically to her.

Bowie was nonplused. But Carmelita gave him no time to decide what he ought to do. She wriggled with all her strength—and this was surprising for her size—almost out of his arms and, when she failed to free herself, looked up at him with such a mute pleading in her burning eyes that he felt sure it must be all right. Half laughing, he eased her down into Monica's arms.

At this the smaller sister set up such a commotion that Pardaloe released her likewise and with her short fat legs, not noticeably stiffened by her long ride, she dashed to Monica.

"Seems like they knowed her," observed Pardaloe as the three men watched the animated scene.

Bowie sat perplexed. "If we could understand their lingo," he said. "This woman certainly does know them, and they know her. And she's an Indian. She must be their nurse—belongs to their family, anyway. Talk to her, Simmie."

But Simmie's efforts to make the woman understand his Creek or Seminole were as fruitless as the efforts to make the girls understand English had been.

"I believe she understands," said Bowie.

He tried his sign language. It was a passport with any tribe east of the Sierras, but not here.

With all three chattering at the same time, Monica took the children down to the river, washed their faces vigorously with only sand for soap, talking excitedly while this went on. The men had dismounted, hobbled the horses and turned them out on the grass that bordered the banks, and made ready to camp.

Simmie opened the reserves of venison. When Monica saw there was no salt she ran all the way to the half-burned ranch house and returned with a supply. It was mixed with ashes, but to the travelers it was more welcome than gold.

She brought, too, earthenware cups and two loaves of badly scorched bread for the strange men. It was ravenously dug into and ravenously devoured by men who had tasted no bread for weeks.

It was a happy supper for three ragged, bearded and bronzed frontiersmen, one keen-visaged and bustling Indian woman, and two delicately shy promises for California's future womanhood. Monica seemed to know even the horses. She talked volubly to the children while she patted on the neck the horse Bowie rode. Inspecting the saddle and mochila, her voice broke. Her eyes filled, but she covertly brushed the tears away lest the girls see them.

After the repast Bowie engaged Monica in a sign conversation forged of sheer necessity. She slowly succeeded in getting him and his companions to comprehend that these ruins to which she pointed with excessive grief had been her home and the home of these girls, whence they had been stolen.

In improvised mummery Bowie asked what he should do with the children. Monica made many gestures, uttered and repeated one word. "San Diego! San Diego!"

Bowie shook his head in dissent. "No, no, San Diego."

"But yes," urged Monica, adding, "that is where their mother is."

Bowie understood "San Diego," but the rest was Greek, and he refused positively to go to San Diego. "That," said he to Monica—though she understood not at all—"is where they like to lock up Tejanos and starve them to death! No San Diego."

His refusal she at last grasped. Then with abundance of signs she suggested a place nearer.

"Mision!" she exclaimed. "Mision!" And pointed with much energy and with a vigorous finger again and again to the south.

Bowie watched her closely. About all he could grasp was her emphatic earnestness. Her big hollow eyes flashed, and appeal filled her voice. He talked with his men; neither could imagine the meaning of "Mision!" The situation was baffling, and after some delay Bowie agreed to accompany her to learn exactly what she meant.

The girls, needing much reassurance from Monica, were taken up again by the Texans, and, with Monica walking fast, the party rode south for more than two hours.

Night had now fallen. There was no moon, but the stars were out. The horses, as well as Monica, seemed to know the trail and at length brought within sight a group of buildings, one of which was surmounted by a cross. Bowie understood this, at least, and when the horsemen drew up Monica pounded for some time on the gate of the stockade that enclosed the place, but without results.

She then bethought herself of a high bellhandle at the side of the gate, at which she tugged vigorously. A man appeared and, opening a peephole, asked questions. Monica seemed known, for when she had explained her presence and argued long and convincingly the big gate was swung reluctantly open and the party rode in. The gate was closed and the man disappeared. After further waiting a light appeared at a window within the residence of the padres, and presently one of them opened a door.

Handing the girls to Monica, Bowie and Pardaloe dismounted, Simmie taking the horses. The two men followed Monica and her charges as the padre led them along a dark passageway. On one side of it he paused at an open door and bowed the visitors into a commodious room meagerly furnished and lighted by two candles standing on a small oval table in the middle of the room.

Motioning his callers to seats, the padre, dark featured, tall and spare, looked to Monica for explanation. With expressive gestures and in a few words Monica told her story, pointing at times to Bowie and indicating again the little girls, who clung to her as if afraid she might escape them.

The padre listened gravely, following with his eyes the recital of the Indian woman. When she had finished he asked a few questions and turned his gaze across the sputtering candles to Bowie.

"No habla espanol?" he asked, adding in very difficult English, "You do speak nothing Spanish. I speak poco English. I understand a few. Monica tell me how you come to Los Alamos with these hermanas. Where from you come? How you have the children? Who you are?"

He spoke very slowly. Bowie responded with more energy. The padre, with a smile, raised his hand. "Please! Slow!"

Bowie nodded. "We are Tejanos, Padre—cannot speak Spanish. We took these girls from Indians—a war party in the Sierras. Do you know these youngsters?"

The padre nodded fast. "I know them much, much."

Haltingly and brokenly he related to Bowie and his companions the story of the raiding of Los Alamos and the burning of the rancho. With little difficulty the Texan followed and comprehended just how he and his men had chanced on the fleeing warriors and robbed them at least of their human victims. It was not the first time, the padre said sadly, that Spanish girls and women had been carried away by bad Indians raiding the ranchos. And rarely had rescue parties, however expeditious or well equipped, been able to recover the unhappy captives if the raiders could reach the high mountains first. And, he added, these thrice-unhappy victims of their savagery had been made creatures to the chiefs—so it had been learned from neophytes. The southern Indians, he added, were even more warlike and ferocious than the tribes about the northern missions. These wretches were Quemayas or Yumas. Both had been scourges of their missions and settlers for sixty years or more.

"And now," he asked in conclusion, raising his hands as he regarded the orphans with a world of pity, "what shall be done? Monica," he said in Spanish, "you know the quarters for the unmarried women. Take the children and find lodging for them and for yourself for the night. In the morning we shall see."

When the three had left the room the padre explained to Bowie that he could not speak freely before the innocent victims of the savages or disclose that these had murdered their father. He added that the mother was at San Diego at the home of a relative and that her son, brother to the little ones, was with her. He suggested that the Tejanos, supplied with a guard of soldiers from the mission, take the rescued girls to San Diego in the morning to receive the thanks and gratitude of their mother and relatives. Where, he doubted not, a generous reward would in part recompense them for the dangers they had incurred in battling the savages and for the hardships incurred in restoring the precious ones to their despairing family.

Bowie listened carefully. He liked the padre; he felt instinctively that he could trust him; yet he felt, too, the need of caution in all his movements and contacts in California.

"I appreciate all you say, Padre. But there are difficulties."

"Such as what, my son?"

"Let me ask a question: are you Mexican or Spanish?"

The padre looked quizzically grave; he spoke with a twinkle in his eye. "My son, Spanish priests are not now supposed to be in California missions."

Bowie caught the implication. "Then as a Spaniard you, too, have felt the tyranny of the Mexican government. May I give you a confidence?"

"It involves no crime or wrongdoing?"

"Certainly not."

"What is your name?"

"I am from the East, Padre. We are Tejanos."

"Granted."

"So we are worse than Americanos. And we are now helpless. We used our slender stock of ammunition in that fight with the Indians."

"But you say, worse than Americanos—how so?"

"Padre, do you remember the Alamo?"

The priest knit his brow in momentary perplexity. "I'd remember it."

"Then well may Texans!" said Bowie gravely. "My scout, Ben Pardaloe, lost his uncle in that damnable massacre by Santa Ana's Mexicans. Few are the Texans who cannot count a friend or relative murdered there."

"That," argued the priest pacifically, "was some time ago. There is peace now."

His visitor nodded. "Not for long, I fear, Padre. There will be more fighting," predicted Bowie almost casually.

"What brings you to California, my son?"

"That is not my personal secret, or I would willingly tell you. But I am treading here on delicate ground. I cannot risk going to San Diego. I had an American friend who was starved to death in prison there not so long ago by a Mexican wretch, the governor."

"You mean Echeandia?"

Bowie nodded. "Even if I were inclined to trust him I would not go. There might be fighting. Someone might be killed, for we would not submit to detention. My business on the coast demands speed. Excuse us from that venture."

"I appreciate all you say, Padre."

"Then what is your wish?"

"Padre, we were forced to kill our horses when we were starving. These horses we ride were captured from the savages. No doubt they belong to the ranchero who was murdered. They should be returned to his family—the trappings are valuable. But we shall be left horseless. I have no money—what shall we do?"

"What do you want to do, my son?"

"To leave your hospitable roof before daybreak to continue our journey north."

"Where to?"

The Texan smiled again. "Padre, I have not given you my name. Excuse that I say only, I am bound north."

"As far as Mission San Francisco de Asis?"

"Probably."

"Then I can help you."

"But why should you help me, Padre?"

"Because," he went on in broken English, "you have done an inestimable charity to my dearest friends. None but a humane, an honorable, man would have endangered his life to rescue the helpless prisoners of these unhappy savages and now depart without asking or expecting recompense."

Bowie laughed. "Padre, you forget. Indians—mean Indians—wherever and however found, are poison to Texans."

The priest spoke on. "I forget nothing, my son; I take nothing back. It is true," he added sadly, "the philistines have despoiled us, as they have all the missions. They leave us nothing they can sell for money or put to their uses. A few horses remain to us in our poverty. These I place at your disposal."

"I will pay well for them, Padre, when I have the means."

"You will pay nothing for them. I have made a poor face, true. But that is only to explain. Our best horses are gone, but we still have a few homely, hardy beasts that will carry you safely—even these may be pillaged from us tomorrow. And I will give you a silent, trustworthy Indian for a guide."

"That would be wonderful."

(TO BE CONTINUED)

'TEA IS SERVED AT FOUR O'CLOCK'
(Recipes Below)

Is the tea party the thing of the past? I sincerely hope not because there is nothing quite so comfy and relaxing as a good cup of tea. And you can make it even more delightful by sharing it with a few of your friends.

The tea hour may be the time to become utterly feminine, with lazy discussions on the fashions of the day, the latest movie, and even tales of cute sayings of Johnnie and Mary Jane. Or it may be enlarged with masculinity, with the trend of the conversation leaning more toward current events, politics, books and even the arts.

A tea party is one of the simplest methods of entertaining, because even though your resources may be limited, you can ask a few friends to drop in for tea.

I have a friend who quite often gives teas on Sunday afternoons. They are highly successful, not because of her lovely silverware or china, (because here I must confess that most of her china does not even match); they are successful rather, because her friends gather for the pleasure of chatting with one another. Conversation flies fast and furiously—but the group is held together by one common bond, the tea cup.

The most meager necessities would include a tea tray, on which the tea set and napkins are placed, a table from which to serve the tea, glistening china, and well-polished silver.

If the party is small you may, as hostess, pour the tea, asking the guests to help themselves to cream or lemon and sugar. If it is a larger party and it is necessary for you to constantly greet your guests as they arrive, ask one of your friends to preside at the tea table for you.

The tea that is served must be good. It not only must be fresh, but must be hot to be palatable and soothing. If the weather is warm you may like to serve both hot and iced tea. Serve the iced tea in tall glasses which have been chilled prior to serving. Sliced lemon and powdered sugar are necessary accessories for iced tea. Place the ice cubes in an attractive ice bucket with the ice tongs near by. As an added bit of color and flavor, garnish the completed beverage with sprigs of fresh, cool mint.

Dainty sandwiches, hot buttered toast, thin slivers of cinnamon toast and small English muffins are appropriate to serve with tea. Popular accompaniments to tea are sandwiches made from nut bread, sliced very thin, and buttered.

You may like to use some of the suggested accompaniments for your next tea party, to give you that much sought-after distinction as a discriminating hostess.

Hot Tea.

Rinse teapot with boiling water. Allow 1 teaspoon of tea for each cup and "one for the pot." Place tea in teapot, and pour freshly boiling water over tea leaves. Cover and allow tea to steep 3 to 5 minutes, as desired. Remove ball or bag containing the leaves, and serve at once.

Chicken Sandwiches With Cranberry Sauce.

Right here and now we put in our plea for revolt against chicken sandwiches that are bone dry! Have you tried putting a thin slice of canned cranberry sauce in with the chicken? We eat cranberry sauce with chicken when it's served on a plate. Why not in a sandwich? Try a slice of canned cranberry sauce in your chicken sandwiches the very next time you make them and see if you don't agree there's a vast improvement.

Cream Cheese Sandwiches.

1 green pepper (chopped fine)
3 ounces cream cheese
½ cup walnut meats (cut fine)
½ teaspoon lemon juice
Dash of Worcestershire sauce
Salt and pepper

Remove seeds from green pepper and chop fine. Add cheese, walnut meats and lemon juice. Cream well together. Add a dash of Worcestershire sauce and salt and pepper to taste. Spread between slices of thinly sliced white bread.

Maids of Honor.
(Serves 12)

1 recipe of plain pastry
½ cup sugar
¾ cup almonds (ground)
2 egg yolks
2 tablespoons heavy cream
1 tablespoon flour
½ teaspoon almond extract

Line 12 very small tea cake tins or muffin tins with the pastry. Combine remaining ingredients in order given and fill pastry shells with this mixture. Bake in a hot oven (425 degrees) for 10 minutes, then reduce temperature to 350 degrees and bake for 20 minutes longer. Cool, and remove from the pans.

Butterfly Tea Cakes.
(Makes 8-10 tea cakes)

1 cup cake flour
1 cup sugar
1 teaspoon baking powder
¼ teaspoon salt
1 egg
¾ cup coffee cream
1 teaspoon vanilla extract
½ pint whipping cream

Mix and sift all dry ingredients. Place unbeaten egg and coffee cream in a bowl and beat thoroughly. Add vanilla extract and pour liquid ingredients into the dry ingredients and beat until smooth. Bake in well-greased cupcake or muffin tins in a moderately hot oven (375 degrees) for 30-35 minutes. Cool. Then cut tops from cakes, and cut each top in half. Scoop a spoonful of cake from each one. Whip the cream and fill cavity with whipped cream. Arrange tops to form butterfly and serve at once.

Date Nut Squares.
(Makes 3 dozen 1½-inch squares)

3 eggs
3 tablespoons water
1 cup sugar
1 cup flour
1 teaspoon baking powder
⅛ teaspoon salt
1 cup walnut meats (cut fine)
2 cups dates (cut fine)

Beat the eggs. Add water and gradually beat in the sugar. Sift together the flour, baking powder and salt and blend with the first mixture. Fold in the nuts and dates. Spread in a shallow greased pan (about 10 by 12 inches). Bake in a moderately hot oven (375 degrees) for about 20 minutes. Cool, cut in squares and roll in confectioner's sugar.

Danish Vanilla Fingers.
(Makes about 5 dozen)

¾ cup shortening
½ cup sugar
1 egg
1 teaspoon vanilla
2 cups flour
½ teaspoon salt
¼ pound almonds (1 cup blanched and ground fine)

Cream shortening and add sugar gradually. Beat in the egg and vanilla. Blend well. Sift flour and salt together, and add to the first mixture. Stir in the ground almonds. Turn dough onto a lightly floured board and knead until the mixture is smooth and no longer clings to the hands. Cut off small pieces of dough and shape in rolls about 2¼ inches long and a scant half inch thick. Place on greased cookie sheet and bake in a moderate oven (350 degrees) for about 15 minutes.

Easy Entertaining.

Doesn't ham loaf with hot cheese biscuits sound inviting to you? It is so simple you can plan and serve the meal yourself, giving mother a day off to visit her friends or to do that much-needed shopping that she hasn't had time to do before. The menu and recipes for this deliciously simple and simply delicious lunch are given in Eleanor Howe's book, "Easy Entertaining," which you may obtain by sending 10 cents, in coin, to Eleanor Howe, 919 North Michigan avenue, Chicago, Illinois.

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