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 outlaws, 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. 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. The group makes its way out of the hills and meets the distraught Monica, the children's maid. The girls are left with Monica and the friendly Padre at a mission, and the Texans proceed to Monterey. Here Bowie completes his business for Gen. Sam Houston of Texas, who has commissioned him to deliver an important message. Bowie decides to have a look at the wild untamed country that California was in the middle Nineteenth century. Bowie disappears from California but returns eight years later and makes the acquaintance of a friendly Spanish family at the Rancho Guadalupe.

CHAPTER VI—Continued

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"You must have dry clothing," Francisco insisted despite Bowie's protests. "You are my guest. I am now what you call the boss; you must let me be your servant. My clothes are not big enough. But my uncle, he is a big one, like you. Wait."

An Indian boy was dispatched with a message to Don Ramon. He was soon back, bringing a coat, two shirts, trousers, stockings and boots for Bowie.

In vain the Texan protested. Don Francisco had a persuasive way—he laughed away one objection after another with so much good-natured banter that Bowie found himself clad in Californian accouterments of the head of the house, walking into the big living room where he met the Estradas.

Don Francisco introduced his new acquaintance to his uncle and to his aunt, Dona Maria.

But the uncle, Don Ramon, and the Dona, his wife, called for particular attention at the hands of their guest. Except for the youthful nephew, Don Ramon Estrada was the first real Spanish gentleman that the Texan had met.

While there was nothing of haughtiness in Don Ramon, there was something that called for consideration and respect. His mere presence made itself felt, presenting as it did a certain graciousness of manner tempered by dignity and reserve that put his guest at ease with a mute assurance of welcome.

When Bowie had met his host and hostess he felt already at ease, so exquisite was the kindly welcome expressed in their manner. But not until he was presented by Don Francisco, with due formality, to a young lady who now entered the room was the gaunt Texan conscious of a feeling of his own awkwardness and ill-fitting apparel. She was Senorita Carmen, of the rancho, cousin to Don Francisco.

The young Spaniard did the interpreting and much of the talking. Host and hostess extended repeated Spanish greetings to Bowie which Don Francisco translated. The young lady was wholly silent, save that when spoken to by her cousin she responded clearly and composedly.

Dinner was announced. Dona Maria was seated at her husband's right hand, and Bowie was given the place of honor on his left. Next to him sat Don Francisco; seated below Dona Maria was Senorita Carmen. As she sat opposite the Texan she made good use of her eyes, yet so skillfully that he was never aware of her inspection.

Don Ramon, as the beef, mutton and fowl in bewildering abundance were served in formal turn, asked many questions of his stranger guest—questions about Texas; about the differences of the Americans with the Mexican government; then as to what brought Bowie to California. This drew only vague generalizations from the Texan. The Don switched next to what lay immediately ahead; what Bowie had in mind to do.

"As to that, senor," responded Bowie frankly, "I hardly have any plans. I find myself here on the coast with two scout companions. Soon we are going up the river, to Sutter's Fort. Our principal occupation in the interval must be to find something to eat."

Don Ramon laughed. "Truly important."

"So we are heading upcountry after game to sell in Monterey. There is a good demand, I am told, from the ships for venison and elk."

"But with the thousands of head of cattle everywhere available to furnish a beef supply?" objected the Don.

Bowie smiled as this was translated. "The beef of the range cattle is no competition for the meat of the deer and the elk, certainly not with the officers, nor even with the hungry sailors."

"And what is your equipment for the undertaking?"

"Our rifles, senor."

The amiable Don was astonished. "Nothing seems to appall you—your undertaking would, of a certainty, give me pause. And you need nothing?"

Bowie smiled. "One thing we do need."

Don Ramon lifted his eyebrows as if pleased—at last he had found a weak spot in the Texan's armor. "What is it?" he exclaimed.

"Salt," returned Bowie simply.

"Then allow me to be your debtor—you shall leave here with salt for yourselves and for your game. But self-reliant as you are, senor, I can lighten your labors a good bit if you will allow me a further pleasure."

"You are most kind, Don Ramon. I realize that we are strangers and your advice might save us much."

The Don shook his head. "Not advice. I doubt if you need it. But what I know you do need is plenty of horseflesh. It will save you much time and some hardship if you will accept a caponera from us and leave here in the saddle—with your salt," he added, smiling significantly, "in your mochilas."

Bowie sat perplexed. "Caponera?" He looked inquiringly at Don Francisco.

"Horses," explained Francisco. "My uncle means twenty horses, or twenty-five."

Bowie, despite his poise, regarded Don Ramon incredulously. Much talk and much translating followed. But it was for Bowie at last to say, as he was best able, that he

Both were beautiful.

and his scouts were grateful but could not think of so great a draft on this magnificent hospitality.

In the living room, while the rain poured furiously outside, Don Ramon smoked tranquilly and listened to Bowie and his nephew. The ladies talked about the wedding in Monterey. In the morning it was still raining hard — the rancho seemed afloat. The Texan had no choice but to accept Don Ramon's hospitality, and the day went in stories told before the big log fire—stories of Texans and the country of the Staked Plain; the story of Santa Ana and the Alamo, which was told without any effort to water down the cruel butchery by the Mexicans. And interspersed were stories of this new California, to which the plainsman listened with hungry interest. Don Francisco had already taken a fancy to Bowie. That evening he questioned the Texan with a purpose.

Bowie, quite alert to all that went on, noticed the glances that Francisco cast at times toward Carmen, who was in animated talk with Dona Maria. Even the Texan's attention wandered at moments from Francisco's explanation to the two women as they chatted. Both were beautiful, of a type the roughhewn Texan had never yet seen. They were beautiful in artless animation. The bronzed son of the desert was almost stunned by the atmosphere of charm. The Dona at forty had lost none of her youth; the years had tempered without engrossing the portrait of her maidenhood. The vivacity of youth was still hers, enriched now by the dignity of matronly charm. Yet Bowie's eyes were drawn to her daughter Carmen, just old enough to realize the presence of a stranger and protecting her attractiveness by the slight repression of girlhood.

Bowie listened, indeed, to the words of Don Ramon; but he heard the cadences of another voice—a voice of sweet-throated music, strange to the ear but bewildering in utterance. For the first time in his life the Texan, without realizing it, began to love the strange tongue in which Californians spoke and to listen for every syllable that might fall from the lips of the young Spanish girl. The clinging black of her gown did not hide the tender slope of her shoulders; it contrasted with the ivory of her slender neck; and above this, from a perfectly poised head, fell soft masses of brown hair. They framed the features of one just at the threshold of full-bloomed adolescence: lips filling with promise of a richer maidenhood; eyes that retired under long dark lashes and opened with a searching light.

"You want to start tomorrow?" Don Francisco was asking. Bowie nodded.

"But I have an idea," suggested Francisco. "My uncle is having matanza this week. He is slaughtering surplus cattle for the tallow. Captain Davis, with whom my uncle trades, is in port at Monterey from China. He will want much tallow for South America and Boston—it will be a big matanza. You should see one. Much attention, much excitement, much work. Stay over a day or two. The streams will then be fordable, and you and your scouts, in the meantime, will be well entertained. Plenty of bears!"

"Bears?" echoed Bowie.

Francisco nodded. "Dozens. They come down from the mountains at night after the matanza offal. Plenty of chance for a bear fight if you like one."

The Texan showed interest, asked more questions, and said he would talk to his scouts.

The next morning Bowie and his host rode out to where the matanza was in progress. Pardaloe and Simmie were already on the scene, watching every move of the vaqueros as one rode quietly into the corral, lassoed a steer by the horns and brought him outside.

When the rider had the beast well placed, a second vaquero roped the steer's hind legs, threw him and, with two ropes taut, tied his feet in a bunch and, with a knife, gave him the golpe de gracia.

What interested the Texan, seasoned as to cattle and horses, was the skill and speed with which the vaqueros worked and the almost human intelligence of their horses—the perfection of their response to every hint of their rider in snaring and handling a steer. It was particularly this skill of the horses that made the work proceed rapidly without mishap or hitch.

For two days the work went forward speedily. The matanza ground was a scene of the greatest activity.

To the Texan the spectacle of such abundance, such profusion of waste and such indifference to everything but the work in hand was a source of amazement. A hearty lunch served to the family at noon was followed by a heartier dinner for the evening, with the difference that native wine accompanied the dinner. This was the family gathering of the day at which the hostess and her daughter were formally dressed.

After the family had settled about the fire in the living room and the conversation had shown signs of lagging, Don Ramon made a request of Carmen.

Carmen took her place at the family harp, ran her fingers over the strings and sang a Spanish song. The conversation and the words of the song were lost on Bowie, but not the clear, true notes of the girl's voice.

Don Francisco explained that the song was the appeal of a lover to the stars to bear witness of his devotion to his mistress. Carmen sang again, a French chanson. It was very slight, but it echoed in Bowie's ears most of the night.

It bothered Bowie, that in these household meetings he could never manage to catch the eye of Carmen. He was discreet enough not to attempt to coax her glance his way—and old enough to be ashamed of himself for his curiosity. But curiosity persisted. Toward the end of his stay a natural resentment at the aloofness of one who had for a week enlisted his lively interest impelled him to practice such retaliatory measure as he could. The least satisfactory feature of his attempt to ignore her was that this made no apparent difference whatever to Carmen. If she were aware, there was no evidence of it—for her, he seemed not to exist.

Don Francisco, on the other hand, grew increasingly attached to Bowie. Everything about the Texan interested the youth. Especially was he fascinated by the plainsman's novel revolver. Indeed, the whole male population of Rancho Guadalupe marveled at a pistol that would shoot six bullets without recharging.

The matanza always brought down an army of bears from the hills, and Don Francisco, seeking excuse to prolong the stay of the hunters, promised them as many bear fights as they had stomach for—black bears, cinnamon bears and occasionally the famed monarch of the Sierras, the grizzly, the highly respected oso pardo, as Don Francisco called him. This prospect of adventure interested the two scouts. They added their appeal to that of Don Francisco, and Bowie — not loath to linger near the flame of the distant candle he had lighted for himself—consented.

Hardly had night fallen when the vanguard of the bears arrived from the hills. Tempted by the rejected meat and offal of the matanza, the bears would come down at nightfall for a feast. This gave the hunters, disposed for sport, their chance. Shortly the matanza ground was well filled with the hairy monsters, gorging, growling, fighting among themselves and snapping ferociously at those bolder coyotes who dared trespass on the preserves of their banqueting "betters."

The Texans watched. Don Ramon, circling a chosen bear, lassoed him by the neck; Don Francisco, watching his chance, executed the more difficult feat of roping the bear's hind legs; and the two horsemen, riding then in opposite directions, forced the bear to fight his utmost to save himself. In the end he was killed. The vaqueros made nightly sport with the big fellows. The Texans, seeing bear after bear brought to the knife, were not greatly impressed.

In the morning Don Ramon invited Bowie for a canter over the rancho. He particularly wanted to see how the rain had left the footbridge leading across the river to the grain fields which stretched in rolling acres toward the bay. Returning, he suggested a short cut through the hills. The two men were riding briskly abreast when, crossing a canyon, they stumbled suddenly, almost on top of a bear ambling along on her way with two cubs to the matanza ground.

"Mira! Cuidado! Oso pardo," cried Don Ramon.

The warning was well ordered. The bear, enraged, reared with the swiftness of a jack-in-the-box on her huge feet and sprang, as luck would have it, at Don Ramon. She struck him with a raking blow of her claw. It caught his trouser leg. The stout cloth, unhappily for the rider, held and the unlucky Don found himself torn from the saddle. In catapulting headfirst to the ground his foot caught in the stirrup, and his frenzied horse dashed down the canyon, cragging the rider a dozen yards before the Don could release himself. As he kicked clear with a mighty effort his head struck a rock, and he sprawled on the canyon floor, half conscious. The bear dashed awkward but swiftly after the fleeing horse and the helpless rider. Bowie, close at hand, had barely seconds to head his panicky mount toward the angry beast and uncoil his lasso. Yelling to the Don to flee, Bowie flung his rope at the loping grizzly. It settled over her head and Bowie, spurring swiftly back despite the weight and size of the grizzly, jerked the monster around and threw her off her feet.

Only for an instant. Rolling over, the bear, doubly infuriated, seized the lasso in her claw and began reeling Bowie and his horse hand over

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hand toward her. The Texan perceived his peril. His horse strove vainly to pit his strength against the strength of his enormous enemy. It was a hopeless endeavor. Relentlessly the bear dragged horse and rider toward him. Luckily a sizable tree stood near. With shout and spur Bowie, plunging forward, whirled the horse and managed to circle the tree before the bear could take up all the slack. It gave the Texan an instant of respite, and he dismounted. But in that instant the bear charged him.

The tree between the two was of little consequence, as the hunted man was aware, and the grizzly's leap was far beyond the nimblest feat of a runner. Taking what was at best a merely desperate chance, Bowie, as he jumped, fired shot after shot into the bear's mouth and head. Then he dropped the empty revolver, whipped out his knife and, waiting not a second, plunged directly into the bear's arms for what was likely to prove a fatal embrace. Only one of the two, he knew could come out alive.

The foreman Pedro was riding away from the corral when he saw Don Ramon's riderless horse racing out of the hills. The half-breed realized at once there was trouble. Shouting to near-by vaqueros to follow, he spurred for the hills. Before he reached them Bowie's horse, dragging the broken rope, shot out of the canyon and gave him the direction. At the same moment he heard pistol shots echoing down the canyon walls. Urging his companions who were stringing along behind to follow fast, Pedro galloped into the canyon.

His practiced eye told him the story as he rode. Whatever it had been, it was over, for the canyon was as still as the grave. On he galloped until, rounding a bend, he saw the bodies of the grizzly and the Texan lying less than ten yards apart, both apparently dead.

(TO BE CONTINUED)

THE SCHOOL LUNCH
(See Recipes Below)

Why not plan a little different party for your friends? Have a harvest home party, where your guests can gather for singing, games, and dancing.

At the end of August, or the middle of September, many of the countries of Europe finished up the harvest season with the harvest festival. There the workers of the fields feasted, danced, and sang, as guests of the mansion. Wreaths, fashioned of grain, flowers, nuts and corn were hung on the walls, to remain until the following year.

Miss Howe will tell you about a harvest party in her column next week which will contain many attractive suggestions.

Whether the children carry their lunch to school or dash home at noon for a hurried meal, autumn school bells bring a major problem to the menu planner. For the midday repast must give plenty of nourishment in a form that can be quickly and easily eaten—and, in the case of carry-away lunches, easily packed as well.

Fruit, cookies, sandwiches and milk in some form constitute standbys for box lunches as well as the school child's home lunch. Cocoa, cream soups, custards and simple puddings help with the milk quota at the home lunch. Cocoa, or a milk shake, as well as plain milk, can be carried with the school lunch in a vacuum bottle. For the box lunch, sandwiches ought to be carefully wrapped so that they will be fresh and appetizing. Chopped meat moistened with a little butter or mayonnaise, hard-cooked egg delicately seasoned, cream cheese, jams and jellies, all make tempting fillings.

Semi-liquid foods may be put into small glass jars with tightly fitting covers. Supply paper cups for the beverage; and as a novelty, put in a paper straw, especially when you pack chocolate malt or iced cocoa. The sandwiches and softer foods should be placed on top to prevent mashing.

Brightly colored lunch boxes are popular, because they are not only easier to pack, and well-ventilated, but are attractive to carry. Literally speaking, you can pack everything in them from "soup to nuts." The lunch boxes should be kept immaculately clean by careful scalding each day.

You may like to use this menu some day when you have plenty of meat loaf left over from the Sunday dinner:

Meat Loaf Sandwiches
Deviled Egg Olives
Custard
Chocolate Milk

Or you might use a menu similar to this for colder weather:

Cream of Tomato Soup
Peanut Butter and Orange Marmalade Sandwiches
Fruit Tapioca
Cookie

There is always an extra corner into which you can tuck a surprise. To the smaller children this will be a delight. It may be a few nuts, or a few pieces of good candy, or it may be the little candy bridge favor you received yesterday. A packed lunch can become as tiresome to eat as it is to pack. Even you will be thinking of the little surprise you can find to put into it, and thus make this task more of a pleasure to you.

So get a lunch box that will be large enough to hold all the necessary equipment, but will not be too heavy to carry, and begin making your plans for the school lunch. Some of these suggestions may aid you in your plans for the school year:

Soups and Beverages.

Soups and beverages, if packed in thermos bottles, will stay hot or cold, as the case may be. The cream soups are the most nutritious, for they contain not only milk but vegetables as well. Try cream of tomato, cream of pea, cream of spinach and cream of asparagus.

There is quite a wide choice of beverages. For warmer weather you may like to give the children pineapple juice, grape juice, orange juice, milk or chocolate malt. When the weather becomes cooler, hot chocolate or cocoa are welcome beverages.

Sandwiches.

Bread for sandwiches should be cut in thin slices, with the butter and filling spread way out to the edges. The butter is easier to spread if creamed first; and the sandwiches should be cut into convenient sizes for eating. Vary the kinds of breads that you use for sandwiches: plain or white, whole wheat, rye, brown bread, peanut butter bread, orange bread, nut bread, cornbread, raisin bread, and rolls.

For filling you may like to use these suggestions:

Chicken, with chopped celery and mayonnaise.

Cream cheese on raisin bread.

Chopped dates, nuts and orange juice.

Ground cooked veal, raw carrots and celery, with salad dressing.

Orange marmalade and peanut butter.

Cottage cheese, chopped olives and mayonnaise.

Hard cooked egg, chopped celery and mayonnaise.

Meat loaf, sliced thin.

Bacon, mayonnaise and lettuce.

Spiced Blanc Mange.

2 cups milk
2½ tablespoons cornstarch
⅓ cup sugar
¼ teaspoon salt
1 teaspoon cinnamon
½ teaspoon nutmeg
¼ teaspoon cloves
¼ cup nut meats (broken)
1 teaspoon vanilla extract

Scald 1½ cups of milk. Mix all dry ingredients together and add the remaining ½ cup cold milk. Combine well. Add hot milk to the cornstarch mixture slowly. Return to double boiler and cook, stirring constantly, until the mixture thickens. Cook 5 minutes. Remove from flame, add nut meats and extract. Turn into a wet mold and chill. Serve with whipped cream if desired.

Desserts.

With the problem of packing desserts solved, there is a much wider choice than ever before. Rice pudding, small tarts, custards, oatmeal cookies, brownies, cup cakes, tapioca, cooked fruit, dates, figs, gingerbread, fresh or stewed dried fruits, and plain cakes are all to be selected to vary the school lunch.

Cream of Tomato Soup.

2 cups canned tomatoes
2 slices onion
¼ teaspoon soda
1 teaspoon sugar
1 teaspoon salt
Dash pepper
2 tablespoons butter
2 tablespoons flour
2 cups milk

Heat tomatoes with onion, soda, sugar, salt and pepper. Rub through sieve; reheat. Place butter in top of double boiler and melt. Add flour and mix thoroughly. Add milk. Cook, stirring constantly, until mixture thickens. Pour tomato mixture slowly into white sauce. Mix thoroughly, and serve.

Better Baking.

Wouldn't you like some good yummy chocolate nut gingerbread or some of those melt-in-your-mouth meringue cookies right about now? Or how about the delicious sounding lemon sunny silver pie? Shall I stop, or have I made you hungry enough to want to rush right out into your kitchen and whip up a batch of cookies, or one of those suggested above? You may have these tested recipes of Miss Howe if you will write, enclosing 10 cents in coin, to Eleanor Howe, 919 North Michigan Avenue, Chicago, Illinois, and ask for her cook book, "Better Baking." You will like them all, for they have been tried in her own test kitchen.

(Released by Western Newspaper Union.)