CARMEN OF THE RANCHO

By FRANK H. SPEARMAN

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CHAPTER XIII—Continued

—13—

"How are things going out there?" echoed the doctor. "Not very well. But for that matter, where are they going well in California? Everything is upset. Politics boiling, lawlessness growing, gringos and these damned Mexicans squabbling; and then, to cap everything else for me, smallpox all over the coast. Bowie, I need an assistant. You'd better join up with me."

But Bowie was serious. "What's wrong at Guadalupe?" he asked as casually as possible.

"Don Ramon is down with smallpox, they say. An Indian brought word from Dona Maria asking me to come right away and vaccinate everybody; and virus here is scarce. They're in a panic."

"Naturally," said Bowie.

"That's only part of it," growled the surgeon. "Fremont steals their horses; bushwackers steal their cattle; the damned gringo squatters are stealing their land; and that's the way things are going at all the ranchos. Bowie, I'm riding out to Guadalupe right after dinner; take dinner with me and ride out, too."

"Sorry. I've made an appointment with Nathan Spear—he was here yesterday—to meet him in San Francisco tomorrow morning."

"That will keep."

Bowie shook his head. "He's going down to Santa Barbara tomorrow."

Dr. Doane did not give up the fight to make Bowie ride out with him, but he failed in it. The Texan was stubborn.

"I shall tell them you were mean about it."

Bowie raised his hand in quick protest. "Tell them nothing about me—not even that I am in California," said Bowie. "I'm not joking, Doctor," he added bluntly.

"Have it your own way," sputtered the surgeon.

But on reaching the rancho Dr. Doane was sorry he had assented to the Texan's injunction. The whole atmosphere of the rancho was mournful. Two almost helpless women—Carmen was the only one with any courage left, and she had more courage than the experience needed in managing and directing vaqueros.

But the doctor brought one great ray of sunshine to the gloom. Don Ramon, he announced definitely, did not have the smallpox: he pronounced his illness chicken pox. Dona Maria and Carmen drew deep breaths of relief.

That evening at supper the two women asked so many questions of the doctor, and these were so pathetic in tenor, that he was hard put to it to give them consolation.

Dona Maria sighed deeply when the doctor tried to offer cheer.

"If only Senor Bowie were with us!" she said. "Nothing has seemed to go right since he left."

"Why did he leave?" asked the doctor casually, though he knew the answer.

"He thought he could better himself up the river."

"Why, Mother," exclaimed Carmen, crimsoning, "you know that's not the reason. Mother doesn't want to blame me, Doctor—that's all."

"Ah!" smiled Doane. "A heart affair."

"But surely that would not send him away back to Texas," countered Dona Maria gently. "Sanchez tells us he went."

The surgeon had his ears open. "You can never tell, Dona Maria," said he, "as to how far these heart affairs will carry a man. Some men would think halfway around the world not far enough. Much would depend, I should think, on how deep the wound."

"I think all this is very silly talk," exclaimed Carmen almost explosively. Up to this point she had maintained a reserve so even that her medical busybody could hardly formulate much of an inference as to her feelings. But he had now worked his probe deep enough to excite resentment. She rose impatiently to her feet. "Senor Bowie," she went on, "is a gentleman of sense and intelligence."

"I thought him a cowboy," purred the doctor.

"A cowboy who has attended Georgetown University?" She spoke with heat. "Senor Bowie is a caballero, not a vaquero! If you had ever talked with him you'd know he is a gentleman of sense, not likely to be seriously upset because an insignificant girl declined his hand." With the words she walked indignantly from the room.

"Senorita!" called the doctor after her, but she did not hear. "Please, Dona Maria," he continued, "tell her not to go riding for a day or two with that arm . . . Senorita Carmen has spirit, Dona Maria," added the surgeon, putting away his implements.

"I am glad she has," said Dona Maria. "My own is pretty well cowed. What with Don Ramon's illness and all our other troubles, I seem unable to face things as I used to. I hope Carmelita will soon make up her mind to marry. She seems interested — at least I sometimes think so—in Don Sebastian of Santa Barbara, who is crazy about her. But the child is fickle. She seems to blow hot and cold with him. And even should she accept him—she is keeping him waiting now — that would not help me. These dons have their own estates to look after. No, Senor Bowie was my only hope for our protection."

"I wonder," mused the doctor, "whether he will ever come back."

"He will never come back," prophesied Dona Maria.

"Who can tell? And if the Senorita married and left the nest, he might even come back here."

"Dr. Doane," exclaimed Dona Maria, "what makes you say that?"

"Just surmising on possibilities," said the surgeon with an air of casualness. But Dona Maria's suspicions had been awakened.

"I believe you know something you are keeping back, Doctor," she said flatly. "What is it? Out with it."

"Can you keep a secret?" continued the doctor.

"Women are not supposed to, are they? But," she added, as Doane seemed about to close his confidence with his lancet case, "try me. I will do my best."

"Bowie is back."

"Dr. Doane! What do you mean?"

"He is in Monterey. And heaven help me! He forbade me tell. On your life, Dona Maria, don't tell Carmen."

CHAPTER XIV

The surgeon jogged back to Monterey, feeling somewhat guilty about his breach of confidence. He busied himself framing a story to break Bowie's anger.

He reached home late; so late he thought there would be no danger of facing the Texan before morning. Yet within ten minutes after he had lighted his lamp in his bedroom adjoining the office there came a tapping on his window.

"Henry," he protested after he had carried the lamp into the office and let in the Texan, "I didn't expect to see you before morning. You don't sit up all night, do you?"

"How did you find things at the rancho?"

The doctor shook his head doubtfully. "Not very bright, Henry."

"Has Don Ramon got the smallpox?"

"He has not—it's chicken pox, but he's pretty sick with it."

"How is Dona Maria?"

"Worried to death but not sick."

Doane was amused at the way the questions came, slowly and covering one person at a time.

"Senorita well?"

"Seems to be, yes. She is looking a little peaked. I vaccinated everybody on the ranch, from the scullions up. What's the news with you?"

"I'm tied up here for a few days. Spear sent a man down to say he had to go to Santa Barbara again and wouldn't be back till the end of the week."

"All right, camp here with me. There's an extra cot in the bedroom."

"How are the vaqueros?"

"At Guadalupe? Pedro is foreman with Sanchez for a second."

"What about the stock?"

"What's left is all right. I told you everybody's stealing it. Let's go to bed."

"There was a big bunch of cattle there when I left."

"What the gringos leave, the Mexicans help themselves to—it's too bad, isn't it?"

The doctor shot the question to catch him unprepared — and succeeded.

"You see," Doane ran on as he turned out the light, "I like those folks. To me, they're the very picture at Guadalupe of the splendid Spanish tradition that came to the New World from the Old. Ever been in Spain, Bowie?"

There was no answer in the dark. But a moment later the doctor, listening in the dark, heard a calm but distinct question not to his liking. "Did you say anything about my being here?"

Doane, in turn, took his moment before answering. "I was hoping you wouldn't ask that; tonight, anyway. Well, I told nobody but Dona Maria and cautioned her against telling any of the rest of the family. I'm dead tired, Henry; I'll tell you more about it in the morning."

"If you had seen her face light up when I told her you were here you'd have forgiven me for breaking confidence—you would, indeed," continued the doctor at breakfast in the morning. "She thinks a lot of you—in fact, everybody does at Guadalupe. The first question Sanchez asked was whether I had ever heard anything of you."

Bowie offered no comment on anything. The doctor thought he was deeply offended but made up his mind it was better not to pay any attention to his mood. After dinner Bowie asked the doctor to lend him fifty dollars.

And the surgeon was surprised in the afternoon by the appearance in the street before the office of two pack mules with loaded hampers. Two Mexicans rode up soon, and one of them, knocking at the office door, asked for Senor Bowie. Bowie himself appeared within a few minutes, casual as usual. He asked the doctor for paper and pen, wrote a short note, addressed it to Dona Maria and handed it to one of the Mexicans and bade him and his companion be on their way. He then asked the doctor to lend him one hundred dollars more. Taking the gold without comment, except a brief "thank you," Bowie started downstreet. He did not reappear till suppertime at the restaurant where the two took their meals.

"Well," asked Doane when they had reached their coffee, speaking as if he thought he had a right to know, "what's it all about?"

"Since you've let the cat out of the bag, anyway, and Don Ramon is down sick, I thought I ought to send a few little things out to Guadalupe to show I hadn't forgotten their past kindnesses, and," he added haltingly, "things like that. What do you think?"

"I think it's fine," replied the doctor.

In San Francisco a few days later Bowie met Captain Sutter, and at Vioget's the two discussed plans for managing the fur business up the river. Sutter took the boat early next morning for New Helvetia. Bowie was ready to go with him, but a knock on his door at daybreak changed his plans. He opened to find the vaquero Pedro standing before him. Greetings exchanged, Pedro explained he had been told by Dr. Doane where to look for Senor Bowie and had ridden up the peninsula during the night. "I have

"I didn't see you."

a note for you, senor, and I was told to deliver it as quickly as possible." He drew the note from a breast pocket of his leathern jacket. It was from Carmen.

"My mother has asked you to come out for a visit at Guadalupe before you leave for Sutter's Fort. We should all be equally happy to welcome you to your old home, as you well know. But even if you haven't time for a good visit, Mother wants to ask a very special favor.

"Strawberries are ripe. Don Francisco Guerrero is giving a strawberry merienda, Saturday. There will be a neighborhood gathering from all the ranchos—you remember what a famous host Don Francisco is. We are going from Guadalupe. Won't you join us? Come out Friday night.

"Carmen."

Bowie did not stop to read the formal Spanish greetings that closed the note. He saw on the white sheet of paper only the magic word, "Carmen."

He slapped Pedro on the shoulder and bade him go down and feed the horses and get his breakfast. It was already merienda day—Saturday.

Bowie made up his mind to ride straight to Don Francisco's. It was the only chance to catch the party. He scribbled a hasty note for Captain Sutter, saying that he had been unavoidably detained and would follow on the next boat. Thirty minutes later he and Pedro were riding rapidly for Don Francisco Guerrero's.

At Don Francisco's a disappointment met him. The merienda party had already left. However, it was easy to follow. He sent Pedro to Guadalupe and took the trail to the valley of the strawberries himself.

A pretty scene greeted Bowie's eyes when he reached the brow of the hill. Below him a valley opened like a huge inverted bowl rimmed by surrounding hills. Each rancho had set up its own pavilion, bright with Spanish colors, and the pavilions were spread in a crescent, opening out on the valley. The various ranchos had their complements or servants; and the horses, tethered among the trees, were as happy as horses could be, close to a running brook, but pestered by flies.

Bowie rode rapidly down the long hill and around to the camp near the pines.

Dona Maria saw him first. She called to Carmen where she stood at a little distance, talking to Don Vicente, a cousin of Don Francisco's from Santa Barbara.

Carmen greeted Bowie with cordial enthusiasm, and he explained in turn the mishap that had prevented him from joining the party at Guadalupe the night before. Don Vicente, Carmen's escort, scrupulously well mannered and somewhat senior in years to the rest of the group, eyed the newcomer with polite interest.

While dinner was on, Don Ramon rode in with Aunt Ysabel from Monterey and more servants. Bowie was greeted by Don Ramon like a long lost friend.

"Well," exclaimed Tia Ysabel to Carmen after the dinner, "I see your peevish Texan is back! What does he want?"

Carmen shrugged her shoulders. "I understand he is to be some kind of a partner of Captain Sutter's, that energetic Swiss, up the river."

"What's he doing here?" snapped her questioner.

"He heard of Father's illness and sent out a couple of baskets of champagne and a lot of delicacies. So Mother asked me to invite him for the strawberry picnic."

"You say Dona Maria asked you to invite him out. She says you asked her to invite him," observed Tia Ysabel bluntly.

"Either way, he was entitled to the courtesy of an invitation, wasn't he?" asked Carmen crisply. "The wine he sent was rare—so Father said. Don Vicente and I are going after some ferns to press—he has my book."

The tables were being cleared and the guests were scattered in groups among the pines and redwoods. Men were smoking and talking horses, the women were chatting in little groups, and the younger girls, with much animation, were hulling strawberries and talking fast. Carmen, swinging her sunbonnet by the strings, sought Don Vicente. She wandered to the end of the camp without finding him.

But she did almost stumble, without seeing them, over the long legs of Bowie, who sat with his back against a tall redwood, looking out at the distant bay.

"Oh!" she exclaimed, coloring with a little confusion. "I didn't see you. Excuse me for disturbing you."

"Don't ask me to excuse you for anything so pleasant."

"Oh, you haven't left your gallantry in Texas. Sometime I should like to hear more about that republic of yours and its fighting men."

He shook his head. "My poor republic. It is no more. The United States has swallowed it."

"And didn't you like that?"

"Not a bit. But—what's the difference? It's only another dream gone," he added evenly.

They were strolling back toward camp. "And so there you were, sitting all by your lonesome. If you can't find anybody else to talk to, why not try me?" asked Carmen.

"I thought you said you didn't see me," he objected.

"Don't believe all you hear," she retorted casually.

"I've seen times when I've wished I couldn't."

As they loitered along she was still swinging her bonnet. Passing a big tree on the long slope, Carmen put up her hand.

"Isn't that a lovely breeze? Let's sit down a moment."

"I'm glad to see your father is out," ventured Bowie. "He's improving."

But Carmen did not care to discuss formalities. She wanted to hear about Texas and what he saw and did there while away. And she wanted to know what was going to happen to poor California, with its bandits, its insurrections and its new crop of detestable gringos.

Bowie shrugged his shoulders at the mention of gringos. "They're mean, I know—but no worse than these Mexican rats. And California at present is getting the very scum of the gringos—the crop will improve with time."

"Tell me about this Senor Sutter and what you are going to do up there. And why you like it so much better than Guadalupe."

He launched into a eulogy of the Swiss.

"But you haven't said why you like it better than Guadalupe," persisted Carmen.

"I haven't said I do like it better," he contended. "It does have one advantage: I don't have time up there to think. Coming over here just now," he continued hastily, cutting off any attempt on Carmen's part to speak, "I stumbled on a bed of wild roses. Do you like brier roses?"

"I love them. Where are they?"

"I'll show you." He got up. She held out her hand, and he helped her to rise. The pressure of her warm fingers stirred his blood. The sea breeze lifted the loose hair about her temples.

"Is it very far?" she asked, looking up innocently at him.

"Not so very far," he answered steadily.

She tried to talk about Guadalupe; he, about New Helvetia. But they got something out of their cross fire, despite the fact that each felt conscious the other was holding a great deal back.

"I thought you said it wasn't very far," objected Carmen after some distance.

"It hasn't seemed so yet to me. It's just over the brow of the next hill. But you're tired—stay here a moment. I'll bring an armful to you."

"Oh no. I want to find the bed."

She seated herself presently close to the roses and spoke from where she sat, while Bowie, with his hunting knife, cut stems from the plants and slowly trimmed away the thorns before handing them to her.

(TO BE CONTINUED)

GENERAL HUGH S. JOHNSON Says:

United Features WNU Service

Washington, D. C.

A DECISION IS MADE

Regardless of our feelings, it is the duty of us all to accept the election's decision. That is our democracy, for which we must fight to the last in this dangerous world—the most precious thing in our national life.

This may not be easy. This has been the bitterest campaign in my experience. Deep wounds have been given—and received. Low blows have been struck. Hatreds have been incited. Class and religious prejudices have been inflamed. Hints of reprisals, repressions and even persecutions have been dropped. Never has this country been so torn and disunited.

We can't let this go on. It is perhaps understandable in such an election, but as that vote decides, so must it be. Bad and surly losers at such a time as this are bad and surly Americans.

There remain issues that were not voted. Chief among them is the extent to which our people wish to be involved in war. This must still be debated and fought in congress, but as to everything which goes to make us strong for defense, our warring factions must do their utmost to be united—one for all and all for one—the country.

It is a good thing too that the election was close. We should hear no more the cries of the victors, "we have a mandate," and, therefore, we hope, no new attempt to ride rough-shod over minorities through popular inhibitions and constitutional restrictions.

Goose-stepped Nazi 99 per cent "ya" votes are what create dictatorships and make wars. There will be no war. There will be no American Fuehrer, if we can maintain a large and live political group of opposition in the country as well as in the congress.

It was a hard fight. I for one, am glad it is over. For me it involved something like the job of "taking in washing by day and digging wells by night." I'm tired and battered and I'm going down to Bethany Beach and sleep for a week—turning over each day only long enough to get my column out.

* * *

In this domestic eruption of campaign and election, we seem to forget all about the war which, after all, is the greatest interest outside our shores. Some columnist who seems to have miraculous sources of information, says that Winston Churchill is getting very impatient about us. He wants to know when we are coming into this shindy.

I hope Churchill can restrain himself because we're never coming in. It will cost us another hundred million and if we spend that much and get into this war, we shall have seen the last of our democratic and economic system as we have known it.

The most remarkable thing I saw in this election was the enthusiasm of young people for Mr. Willkie. He himself seemed to grow younger in this campaign regarding of its grueling demands. I never saw Mrs. Willkie look better than on its last night. I think she is the best campaigner he has had. When I told her that, she said:

"Oh, no, all I did was to wave."

Although he lost, Mr. Willkie represents something most precious and valuable in American life, and the whole country has come to know it. Eggs, wastebaskets and political scurrility cannot obscure it.

If he had had at least a little professional organization — if he had been attended by people with a little more experience in campaign speaking—if advisers who were rank war interventionists had not prevented him from taking the forthright stand against war that is in his heart, his election would have been a walk-in. I know that from my own experience in many states, and before audiences in the aggregate tens of thousands. It was the livest issue in this campaign, but such was Mr. Willkie's instinctive shrinking from any appeal to emotion—any appeal to anything but what he regarded as debate on absolute factual issues alone—things that did not reside in conjecture but that he could prove by the book—that he wouldn't use it.

It was pretty but it wasn't politics—even perfectly legitimate politics. Yet, much as I regret to see a failure fully to express and to represent what I know to be the heart and soul of the American people—because there was no way to lay it out with a T-square and compass on a drawing board blue print — he wouldn't touch it. Yet, I am glad to have been so closely associated with a man so scrupulously conscientious, so fundamentally honest.

* * *

I am glad to recall that before our rift in opinion, Mr. Roosevelt was almost as dear to me as a chum, confidant and companion as any man I have known. So is Mr. Willkie and while I believe the election would be far better, for the country, to have gone the other way, I sent the President this telegram: "Dear Boss. I have fought you, but the American people thought otherwise. We must all now get together. I am still a soldier and you are my commander-in-chief."

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By RUTH WYETH SPEARS

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* * *

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Bright and Cheerful

What do the flowers say, that nod at you from field and garden and lane? I think they say "Be cheerful; look as bright as you can. Leave off frowning, and cheer other people up; smiles cost nothing, but can often lift the shadows and bless the heart."

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