CARMEN OF THE RANCHO

By FRANK H. SPEARMAN

© Frank H. Spearman WNU Service

CHAPTER XV—Continued

—15—

The Texan was as good as his word. When Carmen rode up to where he had halted, a look passed between them that only they understood.

The three rode together. As they approached the river Carmen pointed. "Do you see those two cabins across the Melena?"

Bowie looked. "I do see them. What are they?"

"Two uninvited neighbors of ours—Americanos, who have settled there."

"But that is on the rancho."

"They seem to think our rancho is theirs. They are what you call squatters."

"They should be driven off. Does Don Ramon know?"

"He has been across there to see them. One of them is your old friend, Captain Blood. He pointed a rifle at Don Ramon and told him to get off his property or he would shoot him. And said, incidentally, there were too many greasers in this country, anyway."

Carmen spoke in the calm tone most calculated to arouse the anger of an honest man.

Bowie exploded. He swore savagely in English.

"I don't understand," said Carmen innocently, though she had a pretty correct idea of his language.

"If Don Ramon allowed that . . ." blurted out Bowie.

"He was unarmed. And he didn't want to get killed."

"But somebody's got to do something. These scoundrels will gobble the whole rancho piecemeal."

Carmen sighed. "Discouraging for the poor Spaniards," she said resignedly. "But the good God will do something for us. We are going too far, senor; let's turn this way to the valley. Does Guadalupe look very different to you from what it used to?"

At dinner the talk turned on the squatter problem already seriously agitating the owners of the ranchos about the bay region. The scum of camp followers, always ready to move and emboldened by Fremont's invasion, had spread over the land like noxious insects, devouring all in their path.

But Carmen's heart was set on the merienda, for the success of which she was accountable, and next morning she had a long list of things to be done in making ready for the picnic. Bowie was called on to such an extent that a more sophisticated man might have suspected she had sent for him chiefly to help her. The Texan, however, enjoyed his work hugely and, having wrung from Don Ramon the privilege of supplying the wine, made a trip to Monterey for some imported vintages and for those delicacies procurable only along the shipping front.

Carmen was startled next day when two carretas were unloaded at the ranch house. "Certainly," she said as she stood with Dona Maria and Bowie, watching the servants carry in supplies, "you Americanos are wonderful."

"But please remember, senorita, I am not an Americano. I am a Tejano. You said the merienda would last three days. And there will be some good eaters among our guests. There won't be much of all these things left to carry home."

It is sometimes more fun to get ready for a trip than to make the trip. Carmen, with her assistants, had a capital time getting ready for her picnic. The weather favored her, and the party set out from the rancho in high spirits; indeed, with the family, the servants and the vaqueros loaded with hampers, and the two carretas, the string of horses and riders looked like a cavalcade. It was led by Senorita Carmen, attended this time by Bowie.

As was befitting, they were early on the ground—among the first—and a busy morning went to making all ready and greeting new arrivals. Following the annual custom, the first dinner late in the day was a gala affair before settling down, ostensibly at least, to the work of gathering strawberries.

Don Ramon presided at the first table with his Dona and Senorita as hostesses. Henry Bowie and a few special guests sat with them. The dinner was featured by game provided by Guadalupe vaqueros. Bowie complimented the hostess on its variety.

"I was lucky," she confessed to him in an aside. "Sanchez brought in practically all of it—the venison and elk and the quail and pigeons—all in two days. Sanchez is the best hunter on the rancho."

Carmen was walking on air. Her face reflected every emotion a happy hour could awaken: low bubbling laughter; natural color deepened by pleasure and excitement; quips and retorts rolling from a ready tongue; teeth and eyes that flashed together.

And when the wines were served, her guests at the tables under the trees sang with extraordinary fervor a drinking song punctuated by the popping of corks and the clinking of glasses. In fact, Bowie's wines proved equal to inspiring more than one drinking song. And as the dinner progressed, the senoritas raised their glasses with the caballeros to augment the choruses.

In the midst of this hilarity and the final moments of the parting day a clatter of hoofs was heard among the more distant pines. At least, it was heard by the ears of a frontiersman trained by many surprises to catch unusual sounds.

In the fewest possible moments a horseman, galloping up to the nearest table, threw himself from the saddle. The drooping head of the pony, his desperate panting, the froth that flecked his chest and dropped from his muzzle, the nervous champing at the bit, all told the story of a grueling ride. The dismounted rider lifted his hat and looked, dismayed and inquiringly, among the revelers as if searching for someone. Bowie rose from his seat at the table.

"Pedro!" he called, raising his hand.

"Senor Bowie!" exclaimed the vaquero with relief. "Please! Will you speak with me?" The vaquero walked rapidly beyond earshot of the tables, the Texan following him.

"What is it, Pedro?" asked Bowie. "What has happened?"

"Senor Bowie—Sanchez!"

"What about him?"

"He has been murdered."

CHAPTER XVI

—

"Who killed him?"

Pedro, under his Indian restraint, flamed. "That Americano, El Capitan Blood."

"Is that bushwacker abroad again? How did it happen, Pedro?" snapped Bowie.

"This afternoon Sanchez, with his nephew Felix, was over across the river, looking for some stray cows. While Felix worked along the Melena, Blood saw Sanchez on the hill, rode up to him and ordered him off his land—you know, senor."

"I know. Go on!" snapped Bowie.

"Sanchez told him it was not his land but that he wanted no quarrel with him and rode away. Before Sanchez had gone fifty yards Blood drew his rifle and fired at him. The bullet struck Sanchez in the back. He fell from his pony."

"Did he die right away?"

"He died before we got him to the house. Felix had ridden out of the swamp when Blood rode up to Sanchez. He heard the talk and saw the shot fired. Blood turned on him and swore he would kill him, too, if he ever caught him that side of the river again. So Felix loaded Sanchez on his own pony and brought my friend home." The stolid Indian's voice broke.

"Get my horse, Pedro. Wait here for me. I will go back with you. Is Simmie at the rancho?"

"He is, senor."

Bowie walked slowly back to the tables. The guests had risen. Pine torches were aflame and, fastened at convenient places, afforded light for the gamesters. They were playing Twenty-One. Carmen stood with a group of ladies who were discussing her dinner. Approaching, Bowie signaled to her. As she joined him she saw from his face that something was wrong. "What is it, Senor. Bowie?" she asked hurriedly.

"I hate to tell you, senorita, but I must explain; yet I don't want to spoil your party. Don't let anyone know. Control yourself. Sanchez has been murdered."

He went on with the story despite her horrified expression. She obeyed his caution so well that he marveled at her restraint.

"It would do no good to tell Don Ramon or Dona Maria at this time—do you understand, senorita?"

She reflected and sorrowfully assented. "I have spoiled this wonderful party for you, Carmen, only because I felt I should tell you why I must leave. I am riding with Pedro back to the rancho. You would naturally want to know why, and I somehow just couldn't lie to you."

"Senorita, it's those squatters, and Blood's the leader. With him to follow, they are getting bolder and bolder. If they can shoot down Don Ramon's vaqueros like this on his rancho you may well ask, what next? Blood must be caught before he can get away—as he will till this thing blows over."

She raised her eyes. The light of the campfire struck them, flooding their depths. "You will be careful?" she stammered.

"I am always careful."

"But this time very careful, senor."

"I will be."

"I shall neither sleep nor rest till you come back."

"I may have to take him to Monterey. There may be delays. Tell Don Ramon in the morning—that will be time enough. Adios, Carmelita."

She could only utter "Adios."

Pedro took a fresh pony, and the ride back to the rancho was made in good time. Bowie routed out Simmie.

If the darkest hour is just before the day, it was certainly dark when the ponies of Bowie, Simmie and Pedro splashed through the Melena swamp and forded the river a mile or so above the squatter colony.

Half an hour later the three men walked single file, like ghosts, up to the east door of Blood's shack. Bowie knocked. It was some time before there was any answering sound. "Reaching for his pistol," said Bowie to himself. He knocked again just as he heard a movement within.

"Who's there?" the words came in the loud hoarse tones of a man just awakened. Bowie, making no answer, knocked a third time.

"Who's there?" This time the tone was savage.

"Hit's Deaf Peterson, Mort. Got any whisky? One o' the boys ez got a bad toothache—keepin' us all awake."

"What boy?"

"Can't hear y', Mort. Got any whisky? One o' the boys ez got a bad toothache—keepin' us all—"

"What did you wake me up for?" demanded Blood sourly. With this abusive retort he threw open the door.

Pedro understood then why Bowie had taken the east door. The faint rays of light already in the eastern sky struck Blood, standing barefoot in shirt and trousers, pistol in belt and knife in scabbard.

Bowie, facing west, stood with his face in shadow. He had neither pistol nor knife on his person. For what he meant to do, either might prove his undoing. Simmie and Pedro had ample coverage if needed.

Like the spring of a mountain lion, Bowie came down on the squatter, pinning both his arms at his sides. In vain Blood tried to get his right hand on the grip of the pistol in his trouser band. Raging, he struggled with his left hand to reach the haft of his knife. But he was held in a loop of iron muscles capable of cracking his ribs.

Blood bit and gouged in his insane way until Bowie delivered a

"Who's There?"

blow that stunned him. In that fraction of a second Bowie, thrusting his left leg upward, caught the squatter's right arm under his knee. When this released his own left hand his fingers flew at Blood's neck.

Despite the rolling and writhing, the squatter was held in a vise that cut off his wind. Hovering close to the two men as they threshed about the floor, stood Pedro, alert to help. Simmie, with pistols in each hand, stood inside the door ready to shoot either way—to repel squatters if Blood's one frantic yell had been heard or to finish Blood himself. But no squatters appeared.

The squatter, half choked, hoarse and bloodshot, hair and beard wild, his shirt torn away in the scuffle, was quickly bound with rawhide strips. It was light enough to make out faces. He burst into a torrent of profanity. "I'll have the law on you for this, you greaser's pig!" he shouted.

"Easy, Blood," suggested Bowie, unconcerned. "If you want your coat pick it up. You're taking a ride."

"What do you mean?" thundered the squatter. Then suddenly he wrenched furiously at the thongs on his wrists; but Pedro had tied too many rawhide knots to feel uneasy over his efforts.

"I mean you're going to Monterey for jailing with a charge of murder against you."

There was dancing that night at the merienda. The camp was lighted by bonfires and torches, and dons and donas, old and young, were stepping to the music of guitars and the snapping rhythm of castanets.

The light voices and the laughter ringing through the pines, the soft beating of the guitars, the serene shadows of the dancers moving through the figures of quadrille and minuet, and the scene lighted by the glare and glow of the scattered fires struck into Bowie's sensibilities as he neared the camp on his pony late in the evening. He was alone and, tethering his mount, he walked to the fringe of the spectators.

It took some little time for him to single out one he was looking for. She stood among the onlookers but a little apart, her eyes fixed on the dancers.

She heard a mild voice behind her: "You are not dancing, senorita?"

She almost whirled to meet the words. She clasped her hands. "Oh, Senor Bowie. Thank God, you are back!"

"Only keeping my promise."

She regarded him with startled eyes. "You are not hurt?"

"No indeed."

Carmen seemed to him never to have looked so lovely—yet there was anxiety in her eyes that she could not wholly conceal.

"Shall I confess?" she murmured. "I haven't slept, and I have hardly eaten since you left, Mother of God, what a relief to see you! You are sure you are not wounded?"

"No."

"Honestly?"

"Honestly."

"Tell me, did you find him?"

"Yes."

"And what happened?"

"Nothing, or next to nothing."

"Tell me everything, everything."

"Simmie and Pedro went with me. We surprised him, and he is now jailed at Monterey on a charge of murder."

"But where do you come from?"

"From Monterey. I rode over with him."

She drew a deep breath. "If I told you how happy I am to see you back, unharmed, you wouldn't believe me!" They were looking straight into each other's eyes. Perhaps it was too intense. She took her eyes from his, looked down and resumed more calmly. "We are breaking camp tomorrow morning. I told our guests we should have to go home. They wouldn't stay after us—so we are all for home tomorrow. And the men are trying to decide what can be done with the squatters. They are everywhere."

"The best thing to do with 'em would be to hang 'em all."

"Are you serious?"

"Quite. They're not bona fide settlers. They're bushwackers and bums, here to steal what land they can and sell it to the real settlers when they come—and that won't be long now either."

"They are calling the last dance. But you are too tired?"

"Not tired, but you know I'm a poor dancer."

She laughed. "You dance well enough: Shall we try it? Oh, there's a young don coming my way. Don't let him carry me off!"

Bowie led her out. He was welcomed by the couples in the set, and under the inspiration of the scene he threw himself into the steps. If he could not be called graceful, he was at least energetic.

To hear Carmen laugh when she corrected a misstep, to watch the play of her rich mouth, of her dazzling teeth and her red lips, to note the flash of her quick eye and the panting rise and fall of her full bosom when the dance was done and she walked proudly away on his arm, would be enough to stagger the senses of a colder man than the Texan. If she would not marry, as she had once told him, she was certainly friendly.

The entire household of Guadalupe were over next morning to pay the last tribute to the dead vaquero. Padre Martinez said the funeral Mass, and fellow riders from the rancho carried the unhappy Indian to his grave.

At dinner that afternoon Dona Maria spoke out in no uncertain tones.

"Senor Bowie," she said, addressing him directly, "Don Ramon feels it isn't quite right to say what I'm going to say, but I don't care—and Carmen thinks just as I do, even if she doesn't say so. I think that if Rancho Guadalupe can be saved from these marauders that are threatening us on every hand, robbing us of horses and cattle every day and stealing our land, you are the only man that can save it. All we ask is to be allowed to die in peace in our own home—and without protection even that may be denied us. Tell us, Senor Bowie, would you come back at any price or on any terms to Guadalupe? What can we do to coax you?"

Don Ramon was smoking calmly. Carmen toyed with her fork and kept her eyes as closely glued on it as if she were afraid it might get away. But Dona Maria's eyes flashed with earnestness as she made her plea.

Taken aback by the sudden onslaught, Bowie sat for a moment silent. He soon felt he must say something but couldn't make up his mind what to say. "It wouldn't be a question of terms, Dona Maria," he said at length. "But it would be hard for me to get away from Captain Sutter. I should have to talk with him before I could give a definite answer. I've told you, and I tell you again, that the happiest days of my life have been spent at Guadalupe. I have an affection for the rancho itself as well as for its household; I think you all know that. But I must think things out. I should like to stay down over Sunday, anyway."

"Delightful, Senor," exclaimed Carmen in relief. "Then Dona Maria and I can have a few long rides through the hills without being afraid of being carried off."

Carmen did not neglect her opportunity. She was in the saddle early next morning, waiting for Bowie, who had been out with Pedro before sunrise to look over the cattle suitable for a matanza. Since the herd was being depleted by thieves almost daily, Don Ramon wanted to turn as many head as possible into money. Bowie changed horses in double-quick time when he saw Carmen and they rode into the hills.

(TO BE CONTINUED)

Sportlight

By GRANTLAND RICE

DETROIT.—Hurry-up Yost is still wearing the same old Will Rogers grin. The man, who came to Ann Arbor as head coach with Willie Heston 40 years ago, today as athletic director looks at Tom Harmon, one of the greatest running backs of all time.

Forty years ago Wolverine supporters, chanting "The Yellow and the Blue," looked upon Willie Heston as the nonpareil. Today the sport-loving city of Detroit can't believe that Heston was another Harmon.

As long as both belong to Michigan football history, Yost merely grins.

"What about an all-time Michigan backfield," he asks, "with Benny Friedman at quarter, Heston and Harmon at the halves and Johnny Garrels at full? What other all-time college backfield could ever equal that bunch? Name one."

The closest we could think of included Thorpe, Calac, Guyon, and Hudson or Mt. Pleasant at Carlisle—or Gipp, Savoldi, Eichenlaub and Carideo or Dorais of Notre Dame, not overlooking Marty Brill.

The Michigan collection still leads.

The Harmon Case

When you get right down to the facts in the case, Tommy Harmon of Michigan has already proved his place in the football roundup.

In the 21 or more games of his career he has been a star at almost every start. They have checked him and there as Bob Zuppke did a year ago. But don't forget that even

TOM HARMON

the brilliant Red Grange knew games where he failed to pick up two first downs. I saw one against Nebraska.

Football has known too many great backs to offer you any complete list—it had known some even before the days of Snake Ames at Princeton, one of the best, around 1889.

Heston, Eckersall, Thorpe, Coy, Mahan, Tryon, Gipp, Nevers, Grange, Nagurski, Joesting, Stevens, Dutch Clarke, Whizzer White and a long list of others have led the parade at one time or another. Don't believe for a second that all had nothing but big days. They have all known dark days on one or more occasions.

Grange Stopped

I still recall the day when I traveled with "Our Town" Frank Craven, the football loving actor, to Urbana to see Red Grange run against Nebraska which had a tackle by the name of Weir—a 220-pound hurdler. That day we failed to see the famous Redhead cross the scrimmage line.

Frank Reagan made over 300 yards against Princeton—but only six yards at ball carrying against Michigan.

Fritz Pollard at Brown was a star back, but Colgate stopped him colder than two dead mackerel.

No one can keep running forever. There were few backs the equals of Eddie Mahan, the Harvard Scythe but Cornell arrested his march at the line of scrimmage one afternoon.

There is a big argument now under way from Berkeley to Cambridge, meaning the Pacific and the Atlantic, as to where Harmon belongs in the galaxy of stars. Many of them will tell you Evashevski made him. Harmon will say so.

Self-Made Back

Evashevski is one of the best blocking backs of this generation. A grand football player. But he didn't make Tommy Harmon.

Harmon made Harmon. When Evashevski went out in the Penn game and his substitute entered, Harmon picked up even more ground.

Great backs make themselves—not their blockers, who can certainly help. But the main job is still up to the outstanding ball carrier, given any sort of a chance to get in motion.

The point is that Harmon has been a star since his first game—a star from his first game in 1938 to his last charge against Pennsylvania.

When he ran wild against California, starting his last college season, scoring 28 points, they all said the Golden Bear was only a fuzzy kitten. But the Golden Bear came back to beat St. Mary's, the team that beat Fordham, and to hold Washington to a 7-6 decision after Washington had played Minnesota practically to a standstill. So California must have had a few good football players on the field.

Ask Me Another

A General Quiz

The Questions

1. Which of the following is an oblate spheroid — an egg, the earth, or a baseball?
2. According to tradition what great author of tragedies was killed by a tortoise, which an eagle let fall on his head?
3. George Washington's estate was valued at a sum that would now be how much?
4. What Greek philosopher was nagged by his wife Xanthippe?
5. Pilate's words "Ecce Homo" are translated to mean what?
6. What is mulled wine?
7. What is a blucher shoe?
8. What ship started for America with the Mayflower, but had to turn back?

The Answers

1. The earth. (Flattened or depressed at the poles.)
2. Aeschylus.
3. $5,000,000.
4. Socrates.
5. "Behold the man!" John 19:5.
6. Wine that is heated, sweetened and spiced.
7. One in which the quarters extend forward to the throat of the vamp.
8. The Speedwell.

THE SMOKE'S THE THING!

THE SMOKE OF SLOWER-BURNING CAMELS GIVES YOU—

EXTRA MILDNESS

EXTRA COOLNESS

EXTRA FLAVOR

AND—

28%

LESS NICOTINE

than the average of the 4 other of the largest-selling cigarettes tested—less than any of them—according to independent scientific tests of the smoke itself.

CAMEL

THE SLOWER-BURNING CIGARETTE