CARMEN OF THE RANCHO

By FRANK H. SPEARMAN

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CHAPTER XVII—Continued

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But only when their fears had proven groundless, when it became evident that not a living soul was within sight or hearing, did Bowie and Carmen realize that a fountain of water close to the plaza was gushing with a roar into the air and running like a river over the potrero.

They looked at the church but did not recognize it. It dawned on them that the tower was gone. They hurried to the house. Their knocking brought no response. They turned to the door of the church; it was still barred. With the earth shuddering every few moments under their feet, they shouted together, called the names of the two padres and their own names. Slowly and cautiously the church door was unbarred. Padre Martinez opened to them. Every soul—men, women and children—of those at the mission were on their knees, sending supplications up to heaven for help. Carmen, breaking into tears, joined them.

CHAPTER XVIII

It was days before Santa Clara Valley recovered from the shock of its mighty earthquake. Gradually news from the neighboring ranchos reached Rancho Guadalupe, and the excitement died when it was learned there had been no human casualties.

The earthquake was past; but Bowie's most troublesome problem still confronted him—the squatters.

He resolved to act at once.

"There's nothing to be gained by temporizing—much may be lost," he said to Don Ramon energetically. "The quake has demoralized them—couldn't help but do it. Anyway, I'm going after them in the morning."

"As you think best, senor. Take care of yourself. To lose you would be to lose the whole battle for the rancho."

Carmen listened to the decision with uneasiness and anxiety, but there seemed no alternative. She, too, only begged Bowie to be careful.

Scouting about among the squatters the day before, Simmie had learned that some half dozen of them, chastened by the fright of the temblor, had decided to seek other regions for their abode. But these were the milder mannered of the invaders. The hard cases remained.

At daybreak the next morning Bowie took Pardaloe, Simmie and Pedro with him. Crossing the river, he directed his men to ask the squatters to come out for a talk. When six of them had straggled from their shacks Bowie, on his horse, explained his mission.

"I've called you together for a plain talk, boys," explained Bowie, addressing the six squatters and their following of twice as many scraggly-looking men. "You are claiming land here that doesn't belong to you. Hold on! Don't all try to talk at once. Wait till I get through and you can have your say. You've squatted here on a rancho without leave from the owner, without asking leave.

"You are killing the rancho cattle about as you please. You claim it's to feed yourselves; you claim that the owner's got more cattle than he needs and you haven't got any. But you don't say a word about his cattle that you've killed and sold in Monterey, do you? Not a word about his beef quarters and hides that you've traded for whisky there. You don't say a word about raiding the rancho storehouse and helping yourselves to flour and grain and wine. That has happened twice.

"Now, all that's going to stop. I say nothing more about old scores; about your trying to burn the mission night before last and your demanding that the Indian women be sent out to you.

"But take notice: You're headed, one and all, to get off Guadalupe Rancho and off the mission lands in twenty-four hours or to stand your ground with rifles and shotguns. For tomorrow morning I'll be here to clean this whole mess up and it'll be done. That's my say. Now you talk."

Deaf Peterson did talk, and he talked loud and long. "We stand on our rights as bony fidey settlers and citizens of the United States of America," he shouted finally. "You can't scare us 'n' we don't surrender our homesteads for you nor for all the greasers in Californy. Capt'n Blood'll be here tomorrow, boss. Talk to him if you want to. 'N' if you're looking for a fight you can get one right here now where you're horsin' around."

"You've had your warning, boys," retorted Bowie evenly; and without further parley he and his companions rode away.

After supper that night there was a council at the quarters of the Guadalupe vaqueros. Bowie had assembled Pardaloe, Simmie, Pedro, Felipe and three of the hardiest of the cowboys for a conference. The plan of an attack on the squatter stronghold was discussed. The suggestion of a daylight assault was abandoned since it was almost certain to result in more casualties than would be likely in a night raid. It was no part of Bowie's plan to shoot any squatters, but the rancho must be rid of their trespassing and their increasing depredations.

No fixed plan was arrived at that night. The men chosen were only told to look to their arms, their ammunition, their mounts, and to hunt up a few knots for torches.

Bowie understood the value of suspense to worry defenders of a post and made no move to leave the rancho until the next day had passed. It was after midnight when he called together his men and rode quietly away for the river.

Carmen had refused to go to her room until he started. She was unnerved by the situation and the danger, and she stood with him at midnight in the patio until the last moment. Tears glistened in the moonlight as she lifted her face to the stars in prayer when he rode away.

The raiding party made a wide detour in their approach to the squatter quarter. They forded the river well above it and came slowly down through the hills on the farther end of the settlement.

The moon was high but the chaparral along the river near the Melena afforded some protection as the horsemen wound their way through it.

In the silence after the next half-hour one man, Bowie, emerging from the shadows, stepped to the ramshackle door of the nearest shack. It was built with a patchwork of boards picked up wherever found and dragged by lariat, behind a horse, to the camp site; willow poles chopped from the Melena swamp had been added, together with strips of condemned sails picked up from the water front of Monterey.

Bowie knocked with the butt of his pistol on the flimsy door. "Hello! Inside there, boys! Hello!" he called.

A second and louder summons brought a tardy and profane response. "Get up," said Bowie sharply. "I want to talk to you."

There was some moving and fumbling about inside with more profane questions.

"We're friends," said Bowie, answering a question, "provided you behave yourself. Open the door."

"Open it yourself," came the truculent challenge from within. Bowie kicked the door open and sprang to one side. At the same moment a pistol shot rang from within the shack.

"What are you shooting at?" asked Bowie casually. "Why waste your ammunition? There are twenty men out here. If you hit one you'll be shot or hanged in ten minutes. We're going to fire your shack. If you want quarter, come out now, while you've got a chance."

A tall, gaunt and dirty specimen of the American outlaw frontiersman of his day slowly emerged from the interior darkness into the clear moonlight that shone into the doorway. He was rigged in a loose ragged shirt and loose ragged trousers. He cursed and growled; swore he knew nothing of any summons, had been in Yerba Buena for three days, and ordered the midnight trespassers off his premises. Bowie made no effort to appease him. He repeated bluntly, "Get your belongings out of this shack if you don't want 'em burned up."

The squatter flew into a rage—apparently a planned one, for he ended it suddenly by pulling a pistol, hidden under his trouser band where his shirt hung loose, and firing it straight into Bowie's face.

It was not quite fast enough. Bowie knocked the barrel aside and laid the butt of his own pistol heavily across the squatter's head as the man sprang to clinch him. He slammed the squatter aside just as a second man sprang like a panther through the doorway, knife in hand.

It was a knife with a long blade. Bowie, taken somewhat by surprise, confessed next day it looked a yard long. He ducked to one side, but the second squatter, a smaller and quicker man, got the knife point into Bowie's left forearm before the latter could escape it. The stab served only to enrage the Texan, and the wiry squatter took a fast beating from the pistol butt while Pardaloe and Simmie threw and bound the tall fellow.

"This buck is a wildcat," exclaimed Bowie, turning his smaller captive over to Pedro. "Look for his knife, Pedro. It's here somewhere on the ground. Felipe, fire this shack. No matter about the belongings. These fellows don't deserve any consideration. But first make sure there isn't someone drunk and asleep inside."

Felipe, with lighted pitch pine, hurried into and out of the empty cabin. The next minute it was ablaze. The two squatters were dragged away and left bound in the chaparral to work themselves free.

"Move fast, boys," counseled Bowie as he galloped with his men down the river. "The whole nest will be awake after that shot."

A quarter of a mile brought them to the second cabin. It was sounded, searched, found empty, and burned. "Guess some of the boys skedaddled," suggested Pardaloe. "How's your arm, Henry?"

"All right."

"Bleeding?"

"Not much."

"Got it tied pretty well?"

"Good enough for tonight. Come on."

"There's another shack," said Pardaloe suddenly. "Look out!"

A burst of gunfire flashed from the chaparral next the river. Slugs whistled through the air. Felipe was hit but not badly. "Charge 'em!" shouted Bowie, and he spurred at the thicket. They rode down the ambush before the three men within it could reload. Short work was made. Two of the men were stopped and bound. The third, dodging rapidly through the brush, was pursued by Simmie out of the jungle, jerked from his feet by a lariat, and finally trussed up with his companions. Their rifles were hunted up in the thicket, found and thrown into the river. Shack after shack of that group was challenged and emptied. Each squatter was allowed to save what he had. The ranch horses they had stolen were claimed by Pedro, but Bowie quickly repaired his tactical error in claiming them.

"Where can a man get to on foot in this country, Pedro? We want 'em to travel fast and far. Give 'em the horses."

At a point where the river, fed by confluents, broadened, and along the slope running up toward the hills, lay some of the choicest field acres of the Guadalupe rancho. Here Blood, as squatter chief, had fixed his own abode. With the airy assurance of a squatter he had resolved to take all he wanted for himself and had sworn he would defend himself.

Held his man against the horizon.

Profiting by the absence of resistance from Don Ramon during his long illness, Blood had built upon his claim a rough attempt at a stockade. It stood on the brow of rise that overlooked the river for miles. The spot had been well chosen for defense and would prove, Bowie realized, a troublesome obstacle to the cleanup.

When they rode up in the moonlight to Blood's place Bowie gave orders to his scouts and vaqueros. "Take no chances here. This man is tough. He will shoot to kill; don't let him beat you to it. Scatter now. Work around by the Melena. Don't expose yourselves any more than you have to."

He had hardly spoken when the scream of a woman surprised everyone. A second scream followed; then a succession of moans, growing fainter.

Bowie's mind worked fast. He passed his rifle to the nearest vaquero. "Spread out and charge 'em, boys. A fight inside is our only chance," he shouted. "Scatter."

Spreading into a fan, they dashed forward. A second surprise greeted them at the stockade—a burst of gunfire. A vaquero was knocked from his saddle; a horse went down. Bowie and his two Texans galloped through the flimsy stockade to find themselves facing five fighting men.

They emptied their pistols, sprang from their saddles and rushed the squatters, who, clubbing their rifles, laid hotly about them. But they were dealing with men familiar with every trick of frontier fighting, and the knives of the quick-footed Texans turned the tide. One of the squatters went down, out. Two of them ran for the cabin, and the remaining two threw up their hands. Pricking them significantly, the Texan pushed them as unwilling shields toward the shack. A gunshot flashed from the cabin. The squatter hostages yelled to the defenders not to shoot and, leaping to the shack door, Pardaloe crashed it in and jumped aside.

There was no further fire from within. The vaqueros came up with loaded rifles, torches were lighted, and the men followed their leaders inside.

An Indian woman, strapped and gagged, lay on the floor. Pedro cut her bonds. She had been kidnaped from the mission. Two men, she told them, had bound and gagged her when she had tried to escape. Who were they? Where were they? Bowie tried to learn. He flung open the back door. The moonlight streamed in. A rifle shot rang out and tore into the lintel above his head. It was from the woods and, as Pardaloe shoved a screaming squatter into the doorway, a second shot came from the woods.

"Hold on, Ben," protested Bowie, pulling the squatter victim away. "Do you want to murder the fellow?"

"Just want to see how many there is up there shooting," said Pardaloe amiably. And without hesitation he stepped into the doorway himself. No shot greeted him. "Jus's I thought; jus' two uv 'em there. Look here," he said, shaking the squatter savagely, "who's up in the woods?"

"Must be Deaf Peterson 'n' the captain," the squatter mumbled.

"Jus's I thought, Henry—Blood and Peterson," commented Pardaloe.

"Get to the horses," exclaimed Bowie. "We'll see how much fight there is in those fellows. Pedro, look after the woman. Burn the shack and ride after us. That timber is thin; not much chance to hide. Go!"

The run, with Pardaloe and the long-bearded Simmie at Bowie's heels, was across an open meadow that exposed the riders to rifle fire. This was held back until the three men were fair moonlight targets. But the beads were drawn on men spurring hard and heading straight at the enemy.

The squatter rifles blazed. Blood, especially, was accounted a dead shot, but the odds that night were against marksmanship from the wood. Pardaloe's horse stumbled. His knees crumpled, and Pardaloe took a cropper. Man and beast rolled violently along the ground. Simmie took a flesh wound under his right arm. Bowie, riding faster, reached the timber before the squatters could reload.

Blood and his companion made no stand. Bowie caught sight of the two dashing through the trees on horseback and gave chase to the one closest. Simmie, more enraged than seriously hurt, took after the other. It chanced that Peterson was Simmie's quarry; Bowie was chasing Blood.

The squatters rode the fresher horses; they were more familiar with the country. And their pursuers, not able at every moment to keep their eyes on the chase and dodge among the willows and laurels, found their hands full.

Bowie succeeded in chasing his man out of the timber to a stretch of open country. Both horses, despite the desperate spurring of their riders, were showing the grueling pace, but both held out till day was breaking.

In the stillness of the early dawn, with Bowie straining every effort to keep his man in sight, the chase, mile after mile, went on; only the flying rhythm of the horses' hoofs broke the silence ushering in a peaceful day. And where nature offered every possible beauty to calm the heart of man, two men thundered in deadly enmity across a field of poppies that turned the dull brown of the cropped grass for miles into a glory of golden blooms.

The Texan with straining eyes held his man against the distant horizon. No thought of relenting, no thought of mercy, restrained him. The insolence and invasion of a squatter might be forgiven. But the Texan's thoughts were set on the cold-blooded murder of an unoffending Indian. That murderer must be held and punished, and his pursuer meant he should be.

With a sharp jerk of the bit Blood wheeled suddenly to the right, away from the poppies and toward the Melena. It was a desperate move for refuge, but if the murderer could gain the swamp far enough ahead of his pursuer he could turn on Bowie and pick him off his horse from hiding.

It was a ten-mile run to the great swamp. Mile after mile fled under the drumming feet of the straining ponies. Yet Blood, even on the fresher mount, could gain but little on his grim pursuer. Every glance backward from the murderer's saddle lessened his hope of a chance to reload for a shot after gaining the swamp, for Bowie, alive to the trick, was bent on defeating it.

Sooner than seemed possible, the two men, racing on narrowing grass of the Melena border. Blood, glancing back over his shoulder, yelled a defiance and, halting on the very edge of the morass, whipped out a pistol and threw a shot at his pursuer.

It was an impossible shot, made from the saddle on a restive horse at more than fifty yards, yet the slug went home, tearing into Bowie's already pricked right forearm and shattering it between the elbow and wrist.

With an impatient curse the wounded Texan, crouching in his saddle, spurred headlong at his enemy. But Blood did not wait for the attack. Bowie knew that the squatter must have a second loaded pistol or he never would have fired so wild a shot—a shot with which he could at best only have hoped to hit the horse. But Blood did not know that Bowie had thrown away his empty pistols and now carried only a knife. The squatter wheeled and plunged into the bog, Bowie racing after him.

When Blood, hotly pursued by Bowie, dashed into the swamp a feathered scream rose from a myriad of birds in their sanctuary, rudely invaded. Slinking cats scampered madly from under the plunging hoofs of the two horses. The Melena woke in panic.

(TO BE CONTINUED)

MONKEYING WITH THE BIG SHOW

From Sarasota comes the word that the circus of 1941 will have more ruffles than ever. It has been going. Hollywood for the past few seasons, but next year the biggest show on earth will look like something out of the "Arabian Nights" via Metro-Goldwyn.

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Norman Bel Geddes has been retained by the Ringlings to streamline, decorate and dress the big show from the peanut bag to the elephants; and circus addicts who like their circus plain and a bit oderiferous are worried. It may be hard to tell the 1941 show from a night club interior.

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The circus of tradition had faded costumes, a hard-boiled Queen of Sheba and a Maharajah of Indore who had two cauliflower ears and a broken nose.

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Cinderella and her ladies generally had the appearance of being refugees from a midway.

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The Fairy Prince had fallen arches, a three-days' growth of beard and a middle tooth missing. And the Caliph of Bagdad seemed freshly bounced from a corner saloon.

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But the old-time circus fan was satisfied. He didn't expect too much.

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There was something rough, catch-as-catch-can and impromptu about the big show that was appealing. If you wanted art and beauty you went to a musical show or a museum. And a circus had to smell like a circus, too.

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But the big top woke up one spring morning and found that it had been to the beauty parlor, caliphs, princes, maharajahs, princesses, elephants, ponies and all.

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When the bands blared for the opening pageant that season there wasn't a plug-ugly in the parade.

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That would have been all right with the old-time circus addict if they had stopped there. But the circus management went in head over heels for glamour.

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They rouged the elephant's toenails, powdered the gorilla's nose and made even the hostlers wash behind the ears. They hired beautiful showgirls, introduced the De Mille, the surrealist, and the De Sylva influence in one movement, and even went in for air conditioning the circus tent.

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If you want your circus straight, with all the smells that had become traditional, you had to stay down near the camels and sea lions.

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And it looks like a non-top trend. Norman Bel Geddes is now reported working on the tents. That looks like carrying the glamour stuff too far. A circus tent has always looked like a circus tent. What it will look like in 1941 is anybody's guess.

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THE BREAK

I haven't any sables to slip elegantly on,
Nor silver fox or monkey-fringe to lure a Don Juan;
I haven't any star sapphires or robe with diamond bustle,
And I haven't any bomb-proof cell to which I have to hustle!

G. K. B.

• • •

"Eskimos Can't Understand People Getting Into Wars."—headline. Have patience; it'll come to you.

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HOW LIFE GOES

Part to working, part to sleeping, part to playing, but most of life goes to **waiting** for some woman!

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Several New York policemen have been drafted into the army, and this ought to discourage Hitler about as much as anything else.

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NEW VERSION

Early to bed, early to rise,
Leaving more to your heirs
Than you would otherwise.

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"Italy Breathes Easier After Pact."—headline.

That isn't breathing; it's heavy panting.

• • •

Simile by T.G.D.—As overdressed as a cut-rate drugstore window.

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EPITAPHS FOR TRAFFIC CHAOS

("Neon lights on store fronts are lights."—News item.)

Here lies Lester
Luther Watt:
He thought a traf-
Fic light was not.

Here reposes
Bixby (Leon):
He thought the stop
Light was a Neon.

Ask Me Another

A General Quiz

The Questions

1. Who delivered the famous Cooper Union address?
2. What great river has its flow controlled by the Assum dam?
3. In what year did Hitler become dictator of Germany?
4. What is the official language of Liberia?
5. An anodyne is a medicine that does what?
6. What person in fiction had the "Old Man of the Sea" clinging to his shoulders?
7. How far do the Appalachian mountains extend?
8. What is a yashmak?
9. How many South American countries have no seacoast?

The Answers

1. Abe Lincoln.
2. Nile river.
3. In March, 1933, when the reichstag passed an act giving him absolute power.
4. English.
5. Relieves pain.
6. Sinbad.
7. From Quebec province to Alabama.
8. A double veil worn by Mohammedan women.
9. Two, Bolivia and Paraguay.

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