

The Clash of Blades

by Johnston McCulley *from The Curse of Capistrano*

Like Robin Hood and the Scarlet Pimpernel, Zorro is a man who helps those who are in trouble or are being abused, but he is considered by some to be an outlaw. In this passage, Zorro has come to visit Lolita Pulido at her father's house, or hacienda, in California. Like many people in the area, Lolita's father, Don Carlos, considers Zorro a criminal. He has secretly called the soldiers, including Zorro's archenemy, Sergeant Gonzales, to come and capture Zorro. Zorro, of course, has figured out that the soldiers are coming, and begins his escape.

ON THE TABLE, NEAR its middle, was an imposing candelero in which half a score of candles burned brightly. Señor Zorro sprang toward it now, and with one sweep of his hand dashed it to the floor, extinguishing all the candles in an instant and plunging the room into darkness.

He evaded the wild rush of Don Carlos, springing across the room so lightly that his soft boots made not the slightest noise to give news of his whereabouts. For an instant the Señorita Lolita felt a man's arm around her waist, gently squeezing it, felt a man's breath on her cheek, and heard a man's whisper in her ear:

"Until later, señorita."

Don Carlos was bellowing like a bull to direct the soldiers to the scene; and already some of them were pounding at the front door. Señor Zorro rushed from the room and into the one adjoining, which happened to be the kitchen. The native servants fled before him as if he had been a ghost, and he quickly extinguished all the candles that burned there.

Then he ran to the door that opened into the patio and raised his voice and gave a call that was half moan and half shriek, a peculiar call, the like of which none at the Pulido hacienda had heard before.

As the soldiers rushed in at the front door, and as Don Carlos called for a brand with which to light the candles again, the sound of galloping hoofs was heard from the rear of the patio. Some powerful horse was getting under way there, the soldiers guessed immediately.

The sound of hoofs died away in the distance, but the soldiers had noted the direction in which the horse was traveling.

"The fiend escapes!" Sergeant Gonzales shrieked, he being in charge of the squad. "To horse and after him! I give the man who overtakes him one third of all the reward!"

The big sergeant rushed from the house, the men at his heels, and they tumbled into their saddles

and rode furiously through the darkness, following the sound of the beating hoofs.

Questions

1. Why do you think Zorro makes the "peculiar call"?
2. What type of figurative language is "bellowing like a bull"?
3. What does *brand* mean here: "Don Carlos called for a brand with which to light the candles again"?
4. Do you think Zorro escapes? Explain your reasons for your answer.