

A Mexican Girl Was The Only Woman Ever Lynched

New York Press.

In Sierra county, California, is the market town of Downsville, in modern times the center of a rich mining camp, rude and prosperous. But Downsville bears the unique and unsavory reputation of having lynched a woman. There is no other authentic case like it in Western history. The chivalry of the pioneers might have been selective. It was, as a rule, even and scrupulous, but in this case it was lost in the savagery and barbarism which actuates a mob.

The victim was a Mexican woman, by name Juanita, 24 years old. She was pretty and had the dark skin and hair of her race. It is said that her character was not of the best, and she was living in the house of a monte dealer, whose name has not come down to us, and who stepped back and let the mob take its course without protest.

On the evening of the Fourth of July, 1881, there was a great celebration in Downsville. John E. Weller, candidate for Congress, had made a speech from a platform raised in the center of the town, close to the hotel. Miners had come in from camps and diggings for miles up and down the muddy length of the Yuba, and the hilarity was great. Among others who became exceedingly merry was Joe Cannon, an Australian, who together with two companions ranged through the town drunk and jovial.

Cannon was one of the most popular men in the district. He is described as a cheerful, easy-going giant over six feet in height, weighing 240 pounds. In their riotous course through the camp the men arrived at the cabin of Juanita and the monte dealer. Friends of the woman declared that Cannon with brutal language had attempted to break down the door of the cabin. His friends persisted that all he had done was to strike the door in a spirit of tipsy revelry, and so powerful was the blow of the giant that he burst it from its frail hinges. After this the men departed. The next morning, when Cannon had recovered his senses, he was told of the damage he had done. He at once declared his intention of going to the monte dealer's cabin and paying for the broken door.

It was said by the Mexicans that, whether or not he went to the cabin for the purpose of paying, he renewed his language of the previous night, and that Juanita, crouched in the corner, had listened to it, still and fiery-eyed. Whatever words passed, Cannon went to the doorway, where the broken door hung loose, and, standing with a hand on either post, looked into the cabin. Suddenly from the corner where she sat Juanita rose and rushed upon him. Before he could move she had driven a knife hilt deep into his chest. The force of the blow, for one so small and fragile, was amazing. It was given as Charlotte Corday had struck hers that ended the life of Marat—"sheer through the clavicle into the lung."

Cannon fell where he stood, stricken to death. He lived an hour. Two thousand men stood about him as he died, and then in a body marched to the house of Juanita. She was ready for them, made no plea for mercy and showed not the least fear. There was a stolid, almost a cynical calm in the manner she faced the situation that added a last touch of horror to the grisly performance. She asked for a few minutes' delay until she arranged her dress and made her will. This latter she did verbally, and then, surrounded by the miners, she calmly walked to the platform that had been used the day before for the Fourth of July exercises. Here a travesty of a trial was had, Juanita sitting calmly and sometimes smiling in the midst of her judges.

The camp was by this time in a frenzy of excitement. Some men realized that one of the most barbarous acts in the history of the Far West was about to be perpetrated and vainly attempted to stem the tide. Dr. C. D. Aiken arose and testified that the woman was not physically fit to be hanged. Before he could further explain he was hauled down and thrown from the platform. A Mr. Thayer, of Nevada, climbed on a barrel and attempted to address the furious mob in the woman's behalf, but the barrel was kicked from under him and he was driven bleeding and wounded from the scene. In the hotel overlooking the platform was Weller, the candidate for Congress, and by his side Mrs. Bryant, who afterward became Mrs. John Mackey. Some one rushed to him and begged him to address the crowd and try to stem its anger. Mrs.

Bryant joined in the appeal. But he had seen the fate of her two champions, and so left Juanita to her fate. The crowd voted that she must die by hanging.

The gallows was built upon the bridge spanning the Yuba, and consisted of a narrow plank under a cross-beam over the edge of the bridge. The woman had dressed herself carefully in white. Her black hair was neatly coiled and braided. On her head she wore a man's hat lent by one of her friends. She was grave but unmoved. She ascended the scaffold with a firm step, and taking off her hat with a quick whirl of her wrist sent it to its owner in the crowd. Her hands were quickly bound. She bowed to the throng, and said clearly: "Adios, mis amigos." A moment later her body swung in the air.