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THE LITTLE LADY OF THE BIG HOUSE

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Содержание

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Chapter I

He awoke in the dark. His awakening was simple, easy, without movement save for the eyes that opened and made him aware of darkness. Unlike most, who must feel and grope and listen to, and contact with, the world about them, he knew himself on the moment of awakening, instantly identifying himself in time and place and personality. After the lapsed hours of sleep he took up, without effort, the interrupted tale of his days. He knew himself to be Dick Forrest, the master of broad acres, who had fallen asleep hours before after drowsily putting a match between the pages of "Road Town" and pressing off the electric reading lamp.

Near at hand there was the ripple and gurgle of some sleepy fountain. From far off, so faint and far that only a keen ear could catch, he heard a sound that made him smile with pleasure. He knew it for the distant, throaty bawl of King Polo – King Polo, his champion Short Horn bull, thrice Grand Champion also of all bulls at Sacramento at the California State Fairs. The

smile was slow in easing from Dick Forrest's face, for he dwelt a moment on the new triumphs he had destined that year for King Polo on the Eastern livestock circuits. He would show them that a bull, California born and finished, could compete with the cream of bulls corn-fed in Iowa or imported overseas from the immemorial home of Short Horns.

Not until the smile faded, which was a matter of seconds, did he reach out in the dark and press the first of a row of buttons. There were three rows of such buttons. The concealed lighting that spilled from the huge bowl under the ceiling revealed a sleeping-porch, three sides of which were fine-meshed copper screen. The fourth side was the house wall, solid concrete, through which French windows gave access.

He pressed the second button in the row and the bright light concentered at a particular place on the concrete wall, illuminating, in a row, a clock, a barometer, and centigrade and Fahrenheit thermometers. Almost in a sweep of glance he read the messages of the dials: time 4:30; air pressure, 29:80, which was normal at that altitude and season; and temperature, Fahrenheit, 36°. With another press, the gauges of time and heat and air were sent back into the darkness.

A third button turned on his reading lamp, so arranged that the light fell from above and behind without shining into his eyes. The first button turned off the concealed lighting overhead. He reached a mass of proofsheets from the reading stand, and, pencil in hand, lighting a cigarette, he began to correct.

The place was clearly the sleeping quarters of a man who worked. Efficiency was its key note, though comfort, not altogether Spartan, was also manifest. The bed was of gray enameled iron to tone with the concrete wall. Across the foot of the bed, an extra coverlet, hung a gray robe of wolfskins with every tail a-dangle. On the floor, where rested a pair of slippers, was spread a thick-coated skin of mountain goat.

Heaped orderly with books, magazines and scribble-pads, there was room on the big reading stand for matches, cigarettes, an ash-tray, and a thermos bottle. A phonograph, for purposes of dictation, stood on a hinged and swinging bracket. On the wall, under the barometer and thermometers, from a round wooden frame laughed the face of a girl. On the wall, between the rows of buttons and a switchboard, from an open holster, loosely projected the butt of a .44 Colt's automatic.

At six o'clock, sharp, after gray light had begun to filter through the wire netting, Dick Forrest, without raising his eyes from the proofsheets, reached out his right hand and pressed a button in the second row. Five minutes later a soft-slippered Chinese emerged on the sleeping-porch. In his hands he bore a small tray of burnished copper on which rested a cup and saucer, a tiny coffee pot of silver, and a correspondingly tiny silver cream pitcher.

"Good morning, Oh My," was Dick Forrest's greeting, and his eyes smiled and his lips smiled as he uttered it.

"Good morning, Master," Oh My returned, as he busied

himself with making room on the reading stand for the tray and with pouring the coffee and cream.

This done, without waiting further orders, noting that his master was already sipping coffee with one hand while he made a correction on the proof with the other, Oh My picked up a rosy, filmy, lacy boudoir cap from the floor and departed. His exit was noiseless. He ebbed away like a shadow through the open French windows.

At six-thirty, sharp to the minute, he was back with a larger tray. Dick Forrest put away the proofs, reached for a book entitled "Commercial Breeding of Frogs," and prepared to eat. The breakfast was simple yet fairly substantial – more coffee, a half grape-fruit, two soft-boiled eggs made ready in a glass with a dab of butter and piping hot, and a sliver of bacon, not over-cooked, that he knew was of his own raising and curing.

By this time the sunshine was pouring in through the screening and across the bed. On the outside of the wire screen clung a number of house-flies, early-hatched for the season and numb with the night's cold. As Forrest ate he watched the hunting of the meat-eating yellow-jackets. Sturdy, more frost-resistant than bees, they were already on the wing and preying on the benumbed flies. Despite the rowdy noise of their flight, these yellow hunters of the air, with rarely ever a miss, pounced on their helpless victims and sailed away with them. The last fly was gone ere Forrest had sipped his last sip of coffee, marked "Commercial Breeding of Frogs" with a match, and taken up his proofsheets.

After a time, the liquid-mellow cry of the meadow-lark, first vocal for the day, caused him to desist. He looked at the clock. It marked seven. He set aside the proofs and began a series of conversations by means of the switchboard, which he manipulated with a practiced hand.

"Hello, Oh Joy," was his first talk. "Is Mr. Thayer up?.. Very well. Don't disturb him. I don't think he'll breakfast in bed, but find out… That's right, and show him how to work the hot water. Maybe he doesn't know… Yes, that's right. Plan for one more boy as soon as you can get him. There's always a crowd when the good weather comes on… Sure. Use your judgment. Good-by."

"Mr. Hanley?.. Yes," was his second conversation, over another switch. "I've been thinking about the dam on the Buckeye. I want the figures on the gravel-haul and on the rock-crushing… Yes, that's it. I imagine that the gravel-haul will cost anywhere between six and ten cents a yard more than the crushed rock. That last pitch of hill is what eats up the gravel-teams. Work out the figures. … No, we won't be able to start for a fortnight. … Yes, yes; the new tractors, if they ever deliver, will release the horses from the plowing, but they'll have to go back for the checking… No, you'll have to see Mr. Everan about that. Good-by."

And his third call:

"Mr. Dawson? Ha! Ha! Thirty-six on my porch right now. It must be white with frost down on the levels. But it's most likely the last this year… Yes, they swore the tractors would be

delivered two days ago… Call up the station agent. … By the way, you catch Hanley for me. I forgot to tell him to start the 'rat-catchers' out with the second instalment of fly-traps… Yes, pronto. There were a couple of dozen roosting on my screen this morning… Yes… Good-by."

At this stage, Forrest slid out of bed in his pajamas, slipped his feet into the slippers, and strode through the French windows to the bath, already drawn by Oh My. A dozen minutes afterward, shaved as well, he was back in bed, reading his frog book while Oh My, punctual to the minute, massaged his legs.

They were the well-formed legs of a well-built, five-foot-ten man who weighed a hundred and eighty pounds. Further, they told a tale of the man. The left thigh was marred by a scar ten inches in length. Across the left ankle, from instep to heel, were scattered half a dozen scars the size of half-dollars. When Oh My prodded and pulled the left knee a shade too severely, Forrest was guilty of a wince. The right shin was colored with several dark scars, while a big scar, just under the knee, was a positive dent in the bone. Midway between knee and groin was the mark of an ancient three-inch gash, curiously dotted with the minute scars of stitches.

A sudden, joyous nicker from without put the match between the pages of the frog book, and, while Oh My proceeded partly to dress his master in bed, including socks and shoes, the master, twisting partly on his side, stared out in the direction of the nicker. Down the road, through the swaying purple of the early

lilacs, ridden by a picturesque cowboy, paced a great horse, glinting ruddy in the morning sun-gold, flinging free the snowy foam of his mighty fetlocks, his noble crest tossing, his eyes roving afield, the trumpet of his love-call echoing through the springing land.

Dick Forrest was smitten at the same instant with joy and anxiety – joy in the glorious beast pacing down between the lilac hedges; anxiety in that the stallion might have awakened the girl who laughed from the round wooden frame on his wall. He glanced quickly across the two-hundred-foot court to the long, shadowy jut of her wing of the house. The shades of her sleeping-porch were down. They did not stir. Again the stallion nickered, and all that moved was a flock of wild canaries, upspringing from the flowers and shrubs of the court, rising like a green-gold spray of light flung from the sunrise.

He watched the stallion out of sight through the lilacs, seeing visions of fair Shire colts mighty of bone and frame and free from blemish, then turned, as ever he turned to the immediate thing, and spoke to his body servant.

"How's that last boy, Oh My? Showing up?"

"Him pretty good boy, I think," was the answer. "Him young boy. Everything new. Pretty slow. All the same bime by him show up good."

"Why? What makes you think so?"

"I call him three, four morning now. Him sleep like baby. Him wake up smiling just like you. That very good."

"Do I wake up smiling?" Forrest queried.

Oh My nodded his head violently.

"Many times, many years, I call you. Always your eyes open, your eyes smile, your mouth smile, your face smile, you smile all over, just like that, right away quick. That very good. A man wake up that way got plenty good sense. I know. This new boy like that. Bime by, pretty soon, he make fine boy. You see. His name Chow Gam. What name you call him this place?"

Dick Forrest meditated.

"What names have we already?" he asked.

"Oh Joy, Ah Well, Ah Me, and me; I am Oh My," the Chinese rattled off. "Oh Joy him say call new boy – "

He hesitated and stared at his master with a challenging glint of eye. Forrest nodded.

"Oh Joy him say call new boy 'Oh Hell.'"

"Oh ho!" Forrest laughed in appreciation. "Oh Joy is a josher. A good name, but it won't do. There is the Missus. We've got to think another name."

"Oh Ho, that very good name."

Forrest's exclamation was still ringing in his consciousness so that he recognized the source of Oh My's inspiration.

"Very well. The boy's name is Oh Ho."

Oh My lowered his head, ebbed swiftly through the French windows, and as swiftly returned with the rest of Forrest's clothes-gear, helping him into undershirt and shirt, tossing a tie around his neck for him to knot, and, kneeling, putting on his

leggings and spurs. A Baden Powell hat and a quirt completed his appareling – the quirt, Indian-braided of rawhide, with ten ounces of lead braided into the butt that hung from his wrist on a loop of leather.

But Forrest was not yet free. Oh My handed him several letters, with the explanation that they had come up from the station the previous night after Forrest had gone to bed. He tore the right-hand ends across and glanced at the contents of all but one with speed. The latter he dwelt upon for a moment, with an irritated indrawing of brows, then swung out the phonograph from the wall, pressed the button that made the cylinder revolve, and swiftly dictated, without ever a pause for word or idea:

"In reply to yours of March 14, 1914, I am indeed sorry to learn that you were hit with hog cholera. I am equally sorry that you have seen fit to charge me with the responsibility. And just as equally am I sorry that the boar we sent you is dead.

"I can only assure you that we are quite clear of cholera here, and that we have been clear of cholera for eight years, with the exception of two Eastern importations, the last two years ago, both of which, according to our custom, were segregated on arrival and were destroyed before the contagion could be communicated to our herds.

"I feel that I must inform you that in neither case did I charge the sellers with having sent me diseased stock. On the contrary, as you should know, the incubation of hog cholera being nine days, I consulted the shipping dates of the animals and knew that

they had been healthy when shipped.

"Has it ever entered your mind that the railroads are largely responsible for the spread of cholera? Did you ever hear of a railroad fumigating or disinfecting a car which had carried cholera? Consult the dates: First, of shipment by me; second, of receipt of the boar by you; and, third, of appearance of symptoms in the boar. As you say, because of washouts, the boar was five days on the way. Not until the seventh day after you receipted for same did the first symptoms appear. That makes twelve days after it left my hands.

"No; I must disagree with you. I am not responsible for the disaster that overtook your herd. Furthermore, doubly to assure you, write to the State Veterinary as to whether or not my place is free of cholera.

"Very truly yours…"

Chapter II

When Forrest went through the French windows from his sleeping-porch, he crossed, first, a comfortable dressing room, window-divaned, many-lockered, with a generous fireplace, out of which opened a bathroom; and, second, a long office room, wherein was all the paraphernalia of business – desks, dictaphones, filing cabinets, book cases, magazine files, and drawer-pigeonholes that tiered to the low, beamed ceiling.

Midway in the office room, he pressed a button and a series of book-freightened shelves swung on a pivot, revealing a tiny spiral stairway of steel, which he descended with care that his spurs might not catch, the bookshelves swinging into place behind him.

At the foot of the stairway, a press on another button pivoted more shelves of books and gave him entrance into a long low room shelved with books from floor to ceiling. He went directly to a case, directly to a shelf, and unerringly laid his hand on the book he sought. A minute he ran the pages, found the passage he was after, nodded his head to himself in vindication, and replaced the book.

A door gave way to a pergola of square concrete columns spanned with redwood logs and interlaced with smaller trunks of redwood, all rough and crinkled velvet with the ruddy purple of the bark.

It was evident, since he had to skirt several hundred feet

of concrete walls of wandering house, that he had not taken the short way out. Under wide-spreading ancient oaks, where the long hitching-rails, bark-chewed, and the hoof-beaten gravel showed the stamping place of many horses, he found a pale-golden, almost tan-golden, sorrel mare. Her well-groomed spring coat was alive and flaming in the morning sun that slanted straight under the edge of the roof of trees. She was herself alive and flaming. She was built like a stallion, and down her backbone ran a narrow dark strip of hair that advertised an ancestry of many range mustangs.

"How's the Man-Eater this morning?" he queried, as he unsnapped the tie-rope from her throat.

She laid back the tiniest ears that ever a horse possessed – ears that told of some thoroughbred's wild loves with wild mares among the hills – and snapped at Forrest with wicked teeth and wicked-gleaming eyes.

She sidled and attempted to rear as he swung into the saddle, and, sidling and attempting to rear, she went off down the graveled road. And rear she would have, had it not been for the martingale that held her head down and that, as well, saved the rider's nose from her angry-tossing head.

So used was he to the mare, that he was scarcely aware of her antics. Automatically, with slightest touch of rein against arched neck, or with tickle of spur or press of knee, he kept the mare to the way he willed. Once, as she whirled and danced, he caught a glimpse of the Big House. Big it was in all seeming,

and yet, such was the vagrant nature of it, it was not so big as it seemed. Eight hundred feet across the front face, it stretched. But much of this eight hundred feet was composed of mere corridors, concrete-walled, tile-roofed, that connected and assembled the various parts of the building. There were patios and pergolas in proportion, and all the walls, with their many right-angled juts and recessions, arose out of a bed of greenery and bloom.

Spanish in character, the architecture of the Big House was not of the California-Spanish type which had been introduced by way of Mexico a hundred years before, and which had been modified by modern architects to the California-Spanish architecture of the day. Hispano-Moresque more technically classified the Big House in all its hybridness, although there were experts who heatedly quarreled with the term.

Spaciousness without austerity and beauty without ostentation were the fundamental impressions the Big House gave. Its lines, long and horizontal, broken only by lines that were vertical and by the lines of juts and recesses that were always right-angled, were as chaste as those of a monastery. The irregular roof-line, however, relieved the hint of monotony.

Low and rambling, without being squat, the square upthrusts of towers and of towers over-topping towers gave just proportion of height without being sky-aspiring. The sense of the Big House was solidarity. It defied earthquakes. It was planted for a thousand years. The honest concrete was overlaid by a cream-stucco of honest cement. Again, this very sameness of color

might have proved monotonous to the eye had it not been saved by the many flat roofs of warm-red Spanish tile.

In that one sweeping glance while the mare whirled unduly, Dick Forrest's eyes, embracing all of the Big House, centered for a quick solicitous instant on the great wing across the two-hundred-foot court, where, under climbing groups of towers, red-snooded in the morning sun, the drawn shades of the sleeping-porch tokened that his lady still slept.

About him, for three quadrants of the circle of the world, arose low-rolling hills, smooth, fenced, cropped, and pastured, that melted into higher hills and steeper wooded slopes that merged upward, steeper, into mighty mountains. The fourth quadrant was unbounded by mountain walls and hills. It faded away, descending easily to vast far flatlands, which, despite the clear brittle air of frost, were too vast and far to scan across.

The mare under him snorted. His knees tightened as he straightened her into the road and forced her to one side. Down upon him, with a pattering of feet on the gravel, flowed a river of white shimmering silk. He knew it at sight for his prize herd of Angora goats, each with a pedigree, each with a history. There had to be a near two hundred of them, and he knew, according to the rigorous selection he commanded, not having been clipped in the fall, that the shining mohair draping the sides of the least of them, as fine as any human new-born baby's hair and finer, as white as any human albino's thatch and whiter, was longer than the twelve-inch staple, and that the mohair of the best of them

would dye any color into twenty-inch switches for women's heads and sell at prices unreasonable and profound.

The beauty of the sight held him as well. The roadway had become a flowing ribbon of silk, gemmed with yellow cat-like eyes that floated past wary and curious in their regard for him and his nervous horse. Two Basque herders brought up the rear. They were short, broad, swarthy men, black-eyed, vivid-faced, contemplative and philosophic of expression. They pulled off their hats and ducked their heads to him. Forrest lifted his right hand, the quirt dangling from wrist, the straight forefinger touching the rim of his Baden Powell in semi-military salute.

The mare, prancing and whirling again, he held her with a touch of rein and threat of spur, and gazed after the four-footed silk that filled the road with shimmering white. He knew the significance of their presence. The time for kidding was approaching and they were being brought down from their brush-pastures to the brood-pens and shelters for jealous care and generous feed through the period of increase. And as he gazed, in his mind, comparing, was a vision of all the best of Turkish and South African mohair he had ever seen, and his flock bore the comparison well. It looked good. It looked very good.

He rode on. From all about arose the clacking whir of manure-spreaders. In the distance, on the low, easy-sloping hills, he saw team after team, and many teams, three to a team abreast, what he knew were his Shire mares, drawing the plows back and forth across, contour-plowing, turning the green sod of the hillsides to

the rich dark brown of humus-filled earth so organic and friable that it would almost melt by gravity into fine-particled seed-bed. That was for the corn – and sorghum-planting for his silos. Other hill-slopes, in the due course of his rotation, were knee-high in barley; and still other slopes were showing the good green of burr clover and Canada pea.

Everywhere about him, large fields and small were arranged in a system of accessibility and workability that would have warmed the heart of the most meticulous efficiency-expert. Every fence was hog-tight and bull-proof, and no weeds grew in the shelters of the fences. Many of the level fields were in alfalfa. Others, following the rotations, bore crops planted the previous fall, or were in preparation for the spring-planting. Still others, close to the brood barns and pens, were being grazed by rotund Shropshire and French-Merino ewes, or were being hogged off by white Gargantuan brood-sows that brought a flash of pleasure in his eyes as he rode past and gazed.

He rode through what was almost a village, save that there were neither shops nor hotels. The houses were bungalows, substantial, pleasing to the eye, each set in the midst of gardens where stouter blooms, including roses, were out and smiling at the threat of late frost. Children were already astir, laughing and playing among the flowers or being called in to breakfast by their mothers.

Beyond, beginning at a half-mile distant to circle the Big House, he passed a row of shops. He paused at the first and

glanced in. One smith was working at a forge. A second smith, a shoe fresh-nailed on the fore-foot of an elderly Shire mare that would disturb the scales at eighteen hundred weight, was rasping down the outer wall of the hoof to smooth with the toe of the shoe. Forrest saw, saluted, rode on, and, a hundred feet away, paused and scribbled a memorandum in the notebook he drew from his hip-pocket.

He passed other shops – a paint-shop, a wagon-shop, a plumbing shop, a carpenter-shop. While he glanced at the last, a hybrid machine, half-auto, half-truck, passed him at speed and took the main road for the railroad station eight miles away. He knew it for the morning butter-truck freighting from the separator house the daily output of the dairy.

The Big House was the hub of the ranch organization. Half a mile from it, it was encircled by the various ranch centers. Dick Forrest, saluting continually his people, passed at a gallop the dairy center, which was almost a sea of buildings with batteries of silos and with litter carriers emerging on overhead tracks and automatically dumping into waiting manure-spreaders. Several times, business-looking men, college-marked, astride horses or driving carts, stopped him and conferred with him. They were foremen, heads of departments, and they were as brief and to the point as was he. The last of them, astride a Palomina three-year-old that was as graceful and wild as a half-broken Arab, was for riding by with a bare salute, but was stopped by his employer.

"Good morning, Mr. Hennessy, and how soon will she be

ready for Mrs. Forrest?" Dick Forrest asked.

"I'd like another week," was Hennessy's answer. "She's well broke now, just the way Mrs. Forrest wanted, but she's overstrung and sensitive and I'd like the week more to set her in her ways."

Forrest nodded concurrence, and Hennessy, who was the veterinary, went on:

"There are two drivers in the alfalfa gang I'd like to send down the hill."

"What's the matter with them?"

"One, a new man, Hopkins, is an ex-soldier. He may know government mules, but he doesn't know Shires."

Forrest nodded.

"The other has worked for us two years, but he's drinking now, and he takes his hang-overs out on his horses – "

"That's Smith, old-type American, smooth-shaven, with a cast in his left eye?" Forrest interrupted.

The veterinary nodded.

"I've been watching him," Forrest concluded. "He was a good man at first, but he's slipped a cog recently. Sure, send him down the hill. And send that other fellow – Hopkins, you said? – along with him. By the way, Mr. Hennessy." As he spoke, Forrest drew forth his pad book, tore off the last note scribbled, and crumpled it in his hand. "You've a new horse-shoer in the shop. How does he strike you?"

"He's too new to make up my mind yet."

"Well, send him down the hill along with the other two. He can't take your orders. I observed him just now fitting a shoe to old Alden Bessie by rasping off half an inch of the toe of her hoof."

"He knew better."

"Send him down the hill," Forrest repeated, as he tickled his champing mount with the slightest of spur-tickles and shot her out along the road, sidling, head-tossing, and attempting to rear.

Much he saw that pleased him. Once, he murmured aloud, "A fat land, a fat land." Divers things he saw that did not please him and that won a note in his scribble pad. Completing the circle about the Big House and riding beyond the circle half a mile to an isolated group of sheds and corrals, he reached the objective of the ride: the hospital. Here he found but two young heifers being tested for tuberculosis, and a magnificent Duroc Jersey boar in magnificent condition. Weighing fully six hundred pounds, its bright eyes, brisk movements, and sheen of hair shouted out that there was nothing the matter with it. Nevertheless, according to the ranch practice, being a fresh importation from Iowa, it was undergoing the regular period of quarantine. Burgess Premier was its name in the herd books of the association, age two years, and it had cost Forrest five hundred dollars laid down on the ranch.

Proceeding at a hand gallop along a road that was one of the spokes radiating from the Big House hub, Forrest overtook Crellin, his hog manager, and, in a five-minute conference,

outlined the next few months of destiny of Burgess Premier, and learned that the brood sow, Lady Isleton, the matron of all matrons of the O. I. C.'s and blue-ribboner in all shows from Seattle to San Diego, was safely farrowed of eleven. Crellin explained that he had sat up half the night with her and was then bound home for bath and breakfast.

"I hear your oldest daughter has finished high school and wants to enter Stanford," Forrest said, curbing the mare just as he had half-signaled departure at a gallop.

Crellin, a young man of thirty-five, with the maturity of a long-time father stamped upon him along with the marks of college and the youthfulness of a man used to the open air and straight-living, showed his appreciation of his employer's interest as he half-flushed under his tan and nodded.

"Think it over," Forrest advised. "Make a statistic of all the college girls – yes, and State Normal girls – you know. How many of them follow career, and how many of them marry within two years after their degrees and take to baby farming."

"Helen is very seriously bent on the matter," Crellin urged.

"Do you remember when I had my appendix out?" Forrest queried. "Well, I had as fine a nurse as I ever saw and as nice a girl as ever walked on two nice legs. She was just six months a full-fledged nurse, then. And four months after that I had to send her a wedding present. She married an automobile agent. She's lived in hotels ever since. She's never had a chance to nurse – never a child of her own to bring through a bout with colic.

But… she has hopes… and, whether or not her hopes materialize, she's confoundedly happy. But… what good was her nursing apprenticeship?"

Just then an empty manure-spreader passed, forcing Crellin, on foot, and Forrest, on his mare, to edge over to the side of the road. Forrest glanced with kindling eye at the off mare of the machine, a huge, symmetrical Shire whose own blue ribbons, and the blue ribbons of her progeny, would have required an expert accountant to enumerate and classify.

"Look at the Fotherington Princess," Forrest said, nodding at the mare that warmed his eye. "She is a normal female. Only incidentally, through thousands of years of domestic selection, has man evolved her into a draught beast breeding true to kind. But being a draught-beast is secondary. Primarily she is a female. Take them by and large, our own human females, above all else, love us men and are intrinsically maternal. There is no biological sanction for all the hurly burly of woman to-day for suffrage and career."

"But there is an economic sanction," Crellin objected.

"True," his employer agreed, then proceeded to discount. "Our present industrial system prevents marriage and compels woman to career. But, remember, industrial systems come, and industrial systems go, while biology runs on forever."

"It's rather hard to satisfy young women with marriage these days," the hog-manager demurred.

Dick Forrest laughed incredulously.

"I don't know about that," he said. "There's your wife for an instance. She with her sheepskin – classical scholar at that – well, what has she done with it?.. Two boys and three girls, I believe? As I remember your telling me, she was engaged to you the whole last half of her senior year."

"True, but – " Crellin insisted, with an eye-twinkle of appreciation of the point, "that was fifteen years ago, as well as a love-match. We just couldn't help it. That far, I agree. She had planned unheard-of achievements, while I saw nothing else than the deanship of the College of Agriculture. We just couldn't help it. But that was fifteen years ago, and fifteen years have made all the difference in the world in the ambitions and ideals of our young women."

"Don't you believe it for a moment. I tell you, Mr. Crellin, it's a statistic. All contrary things are transient. Ever woman remains Avoman, everlasting, eternal. Not until our girl-children cease from playing with dolls and from looking at their own enticingness in mirrors, will woman ever be otherwise than what she has always been: first, the mother, second, the mate of man. It is a statistic. I've been looking up the girls who graduate from the State Normal. You will notice that those who marry by the way before graduation are excluded. Nevertheless, the average length of time the graduates actually teach school is little more than two years. And when you consider that a lot of them, through ill looks and ill luck, are foredoomed old maids and are foredoomed to teach all their lives, you can see how they cut down the period of

teaching of the marriageable ones."

"A woman, even a girl-woman, will have her way where mere men are concerned," Crellin muttered, unable to dispute his employer's figures but resolved to look them up.

"And your girl-woman will go to Stanford," Forrest laughed, as he prepared to lift his mare into a gallop, "and you and I and all men, to the end of time, will see to it that they do have their way."

Crellin smiled to himself as his employer diminished down the road; for Crellin knew his Kipling, and the thought that caused the smile was: "But where's the kid of your own, Mr. Forrest?" He decided to repeat it to Mrs. Crellin over the breakfast coffee.

Once again Dick Forrest delayed ere he gained the Big House. The man he stopped he addressed as Mendenhall, who was his horse-manager as well as pasture expert, and who was reputed to know, not only every blade of grass on the ranch, but the length of every blade of grass and its age from seed-germination as well.

At signal from Forrest, Mendenhall drew up the two colts he was driving in a double breaking-cart. What had caused Forrest to signal was a glance he had caught, across the northern edge of the valley, of great, smooth-hill ranges miles beyond, touched by the sun and deeply green where they projected into the vast flat of the Sacramento Valley.

The talk that followed was quick and abbreviated to terms of understanding between two men who knew. Grass was the subject. Mention was made of the winter rainfall and of the chance for late spring rains to come. Names occurred, such as the

Little Coyote and Los Cuatos creeks, the Yolo and the Miramar hills, the Big Basin, Round Valley, and the San Anselmo and Los Banos ranges. Movements of herds and droves, past, present, and to come, were discussed, as well as the outlook for cultivated hay in far upland pastures and the estimates of such hay that still remained over the winter in remote barns in the sheltered mountain valleys where herds had wintered and been fed.

Under the oaks, at the stamping posts, Forrest was saved the trouble of tying the Man-Eater. A stableman came on the run to take the mare, and Forrest, scarce pausing for a word about a horse by the name of Duddy, was clanking his spurs into the Big House.

Chapter III

Forrest entered a section of the Big House by way of a massive, hewn-timber, iron-studded door that let in at the foot of what seemed a donjon keep. The floor was cement, and doors let off in various directions. One, opening to a Chinese in the white apron and starched cap of a chef, emitted at the same time the low hum of a dynamo. It was this that deflected Forrest from his straight path. He paused, holding the door ajar, and peered into a cool, electric-lighted cement room where stood a long, glass-fronted, glass-shelved refrigerator flanked by an ice-machine and a dynamo. On the floor, in greasy overalls, squatted a greasy little man to whom his employer nodded.

"Anything wrong, Thompson?" he asked.

"There *was,"* was the answer, positive and complete.

Forrest closed the door and went on along a passage that was like a tunnel. Narrow, iron-barred openings, like the slits for archers in medieval castles, dimly lighted the way. Another door gave access to a long, low room, beam-ceilinged, with a fireplace in which an ox could have been roasted. A huge stump, resting on a bed of coals, blazed brightly. Two billiard tables, several card tables, lounging corners, and a miniature bar constituted the major furnishing. Two young men chalked their cues and returned Forrest's greeting.

"Good morning, Mr. Naismith," he bantered. " – More

material for the *Breeders' Gazette?"*

Naismith, a youngish man of thirty, with glasses, smiled sheepishly and cocked his head at his companion.

"Wainwright challenged me," he explained.

"Which means that Lute and Ernestine must still be beauty-sleeping," Forrest laughed.

Young Wainwright bristled to acceptance of the challenge, but before he could utter the retort on his lips his host was moving on and addressing Naismith over his shoulder.

"Do you want to come along at eleven: thirty? Thayer and I are running out in the machine to look over the Shropshires. He wants about ten carloads of rams. You ought to find good stuff in this matter of Idaho shipments. Bring your camera along. – Seen Thayer this morning?"

"Just came in to breakfast as we were leaving," Bert Wainwright volunteered.

"Tell him to be ready at eleven-thirty if you see him. You're not invited, Bert… out of kindness. The girls are sure to be up then."

"Take Rita along with you anyway," Bert pleaded.

"No fear," was Forrest's reply from the door. "We're on business. Besides, you can't pry Rita from Ernestine with block-and-tackle."

"That's why I wanted to see if you could," Bert grinned.

"Funny how fellows never appreciate their own sisters." Forrest paused for a perceptible moment. "I always thought Rita

was a real nice sister. What's the matter with her?"

Before a reply could reach him, he had closed the door and was jingling his spurs along the passage to a spiral stairway of broad concrete steps. As he left the head of the stairway, a dance-time piano measure and burst of laughter made him peep into a white morning room, flooded with sunshine. A young girl, in rose-colored kimono and boudoir cap, was at the instrument, while two others, similarly accoutered, in each other's arms, were parodying a dance never learned at dancing school nor intended by the participants for male eyes to see.

The girl at the piano discovered him, winked, and played on. Not for another minute did the dancers spy him. They gave startled cries, collapsed, laughing, in each other's arms, and the music stopped. They were gorgeous, healthy young creatures, the three of them, and Forrest's eye kindled as he looked at them in quite the same way that it had kindled when he regarded the Fotherington Princess.

Persiflage, of the sort that obtains among young things of the human kind, flew back and forth.

"I've been here five minutes," Dick Forrest asserted.

The two dancers, to cover their confusion, doubted his veracity and instanced his many well-known and notorious guilts of mendacity. The girl at the piano, Ernestine, his sister-in-law, insisted that pearls of truth fell from his lips, that she had seen him from the moment he began to look, and that as she estimated the passage of time he had been looking much longer than five

minutes.

"Well, anyway," Forrest broke in on their babel, "Bert, the sweet innocent, doesn't think you are up yet."

"We're not… to him," one of the dancers, a vivacious young Venus, retorted. "Nor are we to you either. So run along, little boy. Run along."

"Look here, Lute," Forrest began sternly. "Just because I am a decrepit old man, and just because you are eighteen, just eighteen, and happen to be my wife's sister, you needn't presume to put the high and mighty over on me. Don't forget – and I state the fact, disagreeable as it may be, for Rita's sake – don't forget that in the past ten years I've paddled you more disgraceful times than you care to dare me to enumerate.

"It is true, I am not so young as I used to was, but – " He felt the biceps of his right arm and made as if to roll up the sleeve. " – But, I'm not all in yet, and for two cents…"

"What?" the young woman challenged belligerently.

"For two cents," he muttered darkly. "For two cents… Besides, and it grieves me to inform you, your cap is not on straight. Also, it is not a very tasteful creation at best. I could make a far more becoming cap with my toes, asleep, and… yes, seasick as well."

Lute tossed her blond head defiantly, glanced at her comrades in solicitation of support, and said:

"Oh, I don't know. It seems humanly reasonable that the three of us can woman-handle a mere man of your elderly and insulting

avoirdupois. What do you say, girls? Let's rush him. He's not a minute under forty, and he has an aneurism. Yes, and though loath to divulge family secrets, he's got Meniere's Disease."

Ernestine, a small but robust blonde of eighteen, sprang from the piano and joined her two comrades in a raid on the cushions of the deep window seats. Side by side, a cushion in each hand, and with proper distance between them cannily established for the swinging of the cushions, they advanced upon the foe.

Forrest prepared for battle, then held up his hand for parley.

"'Fraid cat!" they taunted, in several at first, and then in chorus.

He shook his head emphatically.

"Just for that, and for all the rest of your insolences, the three of you are going to get yours. All the wrongs of a lifetime are rising now in my brain in a dazzling brightness. I shall go Berserk in a moment. But first, and I speak as an agriculturist, and I address myself to you, Lute, in all humility, in heaven's name what is Meniere's Disease? Do sheep catch it?"

"Meniere's Disease is," Lute began… "is what you've got. Sheep are the only known living creatures that get it."

Ensued red war and chaos. Forrest made a football rush of the sort that obtained in California before the adoption of Rugby; and the girls broke the line to let him through, turned upon him, flanked him on either side, and pounded him with cushions.

He turned, with widespread arms, extended fingers, each finger a hook, and grappled the three. The battle became a

whirlwind, a be-spurred man the center, from which radiated flying draperies of flimsy silk, disconnected slippers, boudoir caps, and hairpins. There were thuds from the cushions, grunts from the man, squeals, yelps and giggles from the girls, and from the totality of the combat inextinguishable laughter and a ripping and tearing of fragile textures.

Dick Forrest found himself sprawled on the floor, the wind half knocked out of him by shrewdly delivered cushions, his head buzzing from the buffeting, and, in one hand, a trailing, torn, and generally disrupted girdle of pale blue silk and pink roses.

In one doorway, cheeks flaming from the struggle, stood Rita, alert as a fawn and ready to flee. In the other doorway, likewise flame-checked, stood Ernestine in the commanding attitude of the Mother of the Gracchi, the wreckage of her kimono wrapped severely about her and held severely about her by her own waist-pressing arm. Lute, cornered behind the piano, attempted to run but was driven back by the menace of Forrest, who, on hands and knees, stamped loudly with the palms of his hands on the hardwood floor, rolled his head savagely, and emitted bull-like roars.

"And they still believe that old prehistoric myth," Ernestine proclaimed from safety, "that once he, that wretched semblance of a man-thing prone in the dirt, captained Berkeley to victory over Stanford."

Her breasts heaved from the exertion, and he marked the pulsating of the shimmering cherry-colored silk with delight

as he flung his glance around to the other two girls similarly breathing.

The piano was a miniature grand – a dainty thing of rich white and gold to match the morning room. It stood out from the wall, so that there was possibility for Lute to escape around either way of it. Forrest gained his feet and faced her across the broad, flat top of the instrument. As he threatened to vault it, Lute cried out in horror:

"But your spurs, Dick! Your spurs!"

"Give me time to take them off," he offered.

As he stooped to unbuckle them, Lute darted to escape, but was herded back to the shelter of the piano.

"All right," he growled. "On your head be it. If the piano's scratched I'll tell Paula."

"I've got witnesses," she panted, indicating with her blue joyous eyes the young things in the doorways.

"Very well, my dear." Forrest drew back his body and spread his resting palms. "I'm coming over to you."

Action and speech were simultaneous. His body, posited sidewise from his hands, was vaulted across, the perilous spurs a full foot above the glossy white surface. And simultaneously Lute ducked and went under the piano on hands and knees. Her mischance lay in that she bumped her head, and, before she could recover way, Forrest had circled the piano and cornered her under it.

"Come out!" he commanded. "Come out and take your

medicine!"

"A truce," she pleaded. "A truce, Sir Knight, for dear love's sake and all damsels in distress."

"I ain't no knight," Forrest announced in his deepest bass. "I'm an ogre, a filthy, debased and altogether unregenerate ogre. I was born in the tule-swamps. My father was an ogre and my mother was more so. I was lulled to slumber on the squalls of infants dead, foreordained, and predamned. I was nourished solely on the blood of maidens educated in Mills Seminary. My favorite chophouse has ever been a hardwood floor, a loaf of Mills Seminary maiden, and a roof of flat piano. My father, as well as an ogre, was a California horse-thief. I am more reprehensible than my father. I have more teeth. My mother, as well as an ogress, was a Nevada book-canvasser. Let all her shame be told. She even solicited subscriptions for ladies' magazines. I am more terrible than my mother. I have peddled safety razors."

"Can naught soothe and charm your savage breast?" Lute pleaded in soulful tones while she studied her chances for escape.

"One thing only, miserable female. One thing only, on the earth, over the earth, and under its ruining waters – "

A squawk of recognized plagiarism interrupted him from Ernestine.

"See Ernest Dowson, page seventy-nine, a thin book of thin verse ladled out with porridge to young women detentioned at Mills Seminary," Forrest went on. "As I had already enunciated before I was so rudely interrupted, the one thing only that can

balm and embalm this savage breast is the 'Maiden's Prayer.' Listen, with all your ears ere I chew them off in multitude and gross! Listen, silly, unbeautiful, squat, short-legged and ugly female under the piano! Can you recite the 'Maiden's Prayer'?"

Screams of delight from the young things in the doorways prevented the proper answer and Lute, from under the piano, cried out to young Wainwright, who had appeared:

"A rescue, Sir Knight! A rescue!"

"Unhand the maiden!" was Bert's challenge.

"Who art thou?" Forrest demanded.

"King George, sirrah! – I mean, er, Saint George."

"Then am I thy dragon," Forrest announced with due humility. "Spare this ancient, honorable, and only neck I have."

"Off with his head!" the young things encouraged.

"Stay thee, maidens, I pray thee," Bert begged. "I am only a Small Potato. Yet am I unafraid. I shall beard the dragon. I shall beard him in his gullet, and, while he lingeringly chokes to death over my unpalatableness and general spinefulness, do you, fair damsels, flee to the mountains lest the valleys fall upon you. Yolo, Petaluma, and West Sacramento are about to be overwhelmed by a tidal wave and many big fishes."

"Off with his head!" the young things chanted. "Slay him in his blood and barbecue him!"

"Thumbs down," Forrest groaned. "I am undone. Trust to the unstrained quality of mercy possessed by Christian young women in the year 1914 who will vote some day if ever they

grow up and do not marry foreigners. Consider my head off, Saint George. I am expired. Further deponent sayeth not."

And Forrest, with sobs and slubberings, with realistic shudders and kicks and a great jingling of spurs, lay down on the floor and expired.

Lute crawled out from under the piano, and was joined by Rita and Ernestine in an extemporized dance of the harpies about the slain.

In the midst of it, Forrest sat up, protesting. Also, he was guilty of a significant and privy wink to Lute.

"The hero!" he cried. "Forget him not. Crown him with flowers."

And Bert was crowned with flowers from the vases, unchanged from the day before. When a bunch of water-logged stems of early tulips, propelled by Lute's vigorous arm, impacted soggily on his neck under the ear, he fled. The riot of pursuit echoed along the hall and died out down the stairway toward the stag room. Forrest gathered himself together, and, grinning, went jingling on through the Big House.

He crossed two patios on brick walks roofed with Spanish tile and swamped with early foliage and blooms, and gained his wing of the house, still breathing from the fun, to find, in the office, his secretary awaiting him.

"Good morning, Mr. Blake," he greeted. "Sorry I was delayed." He glanced at his wrist-watch. "Only four minutes, however. I just couldn't get away sooner."

Chapter IV

From nine till ten Forrest gave himself up to his secretary, achieving a correspondence that included learned societies and every sort of breeding and agricultural organization and that would have compelled the average petty business man, unaided, to sit up till midnight to accomplish.

For Dick Forrest was the center of a system which he himself had built and of which he was secretly very proud. Important letters and documents he signed with his ragged fist. All other letters were rubber-stamped by Mr. Blake, who, also, in shorthand, in the course of the hour, put down the indicated answers to many letters and received the formula designations of reply to many other letters. Mr. Blake's private opinion was that he worked longer hours than his employer, although it was equally his private opinion that his employer was a wonder for discovering work for others to perform.

At ten, to the stroke of the clock, as Pittman, Forrest's show-manager, entered the office, Blake, burdened with trays of correspondence, sheafs of documents, and phonograph cylinders, faded away to his own office.

From ten to eleven a stream of managers and foremen flowed in and out. All were well disciplined in terseness and time-saving. As Dick Forrest had taught them, the minutes spent with him were not minutes of cogitation. They must

be prepared before they reported or suggested. Bonbright, the assistant secretary, always arrived at ten to replace Blake; and Bonbright, close to shoulder, with flying pencil, took down the rapid-fire interchange of question and answer, statement and proposal and plan. These shorthand notes, transcribed and typed in duplicate, were the nightmare and, on occasion, the Nemesis, of the managers and foremen. For, first, Forrest had a remarkable memory; and, second, he was prone to prove its worth by reference to those same notes of Bonbright.

A manager, at the end of a five or ten minute session, often emerged sweating, limp and frazzled. Yet for a swift hour, at high tension, Forrest met all comers, with a master's grip handling them and all the multifarious details of their various departments. He told Thompson, the machinist, in four flashing minutes, where the fault lay in the dynamo to the Big House refrigerator, laid the fault home to Thompson, dictated a note to Bonbright, with citation by page and chapter to a volume from the library to be drawn by Thompson, told Thompson that Parkman, the dairy manager, was not satisfied with the latest wiring up of milking machines, and that the refrigerating plant at the slaughter house was balking at its accustomed load.

Each man was a specialist, yet Forrest was the proved master of their specialties. As Paulson, the head plowman, complained privily to Dawson, the crop manager: "I've worked here twelve years and never have I seen him put his hands to a plow, and yet, damn him, he somehow seems to know. He's a genius, that's

what he is. Why, d'ye know, I've seen him tear by a piece of work, his hands full with that Man-Eater of his a-threatenin' sudden funeral, an', next morning, had 'm mention casually to a half-inch how deep it was plowed an' what plows'd done the plowin'! – Take that plowin' of the Poppy Meadow, up above Little Meadow, on Los Cuatos. I just couldn't see my way to it, an' had to cut out the cross-sub-soiling, an' thought I could slip it over on him. After it was all finished he kind of happened up that way – I was lookin' an' he didn't seem to look – an', well, next A.M. I got mine in the office. No; I didn't slip it over. I ain't tried to slip nothing over since."

At eleven sharp, Wardman, his sheep manager, departed with an engagement scheduled at eleven: thirty to ride in the machine along with Thayer, the Idaho buyer, to look over the Shropshire rams. At eleven, Bonbright having departed with Wardman to work up his notes, Forrest was left alone in the office. From a wire tray of unfinished business – one of many wire trays superimposed in groups of five – he drew a pamphlet issued by the State of Iowa on hog cholera and proceeded to scan it.

Five feet, ten inches in height, weighing a clean-muscled one hundred and eighty pounds, Dick Forrest was anything but insignificant for a forty years' old man. The eyes were gray, large, over-arched by bone of brow, and lashes and brows were dark. The hair, above an ordinary forehead, was light brown to chestnut. Under the forehead, the cheeks showed high-boned, with underneath the slight hollows that necessarily accompany

such formation. The jaws were strong without massiveness, the nose, large-nostriled, was straight enough and prominent enough without being too straight or prominent, the chin square without harshness and uncleft, and the mouth girlish and sweet to a degree that did not hide the firmness to which the lips could set on due provocation. The skin was smooth and well-tanned, although, midway between eyebrows and hair, the tan of forehead faded in advertisement of the rim of the Baden Powell interposed between him and the sun.

Laughter lurked in the mouth corners and eye-corners, and there were cheek lines about the mouth that would seem to have been formed by laughter. Equally strong, however, every line of the face that meant blended things carried a notice of surety. Dick Forrest was sure – sure, when his hand reached out for any object on his desk, that the hand would straightly attain the object without a fumble or a miss of a fraction of an inch; sure, when his brain leaped the high places of the hog cholera text, that it was not missing a point; sure, from his balanced body in the revolving desk-chair to the balanced back-head of him; sure, in heart and brain, of life and work, of all he possessed, and of himself.

He had reason to be sure. Body, brain, and career were long-proven sure. A rich man's son, he had not played ducks and drakes with his father's money. City born and reared, he had gone back to the land and made such a success as to put his name on the lips of breeders wherever breeders met and talked. He was the owner, without encumbrance, of two hundred and fifty

thousand acres of land – land that varied in value from a thousand dollars an acre to a hundred dollars, that varied from a hundred dollars to ten cents an acre, and that, in stretches, was not worth a penny an acre. The improvements on that quarter of a million acres, from drain-tiled meadows to dredge-drained tule swamps, from good roads to developed water-rights, from farm buildings to the Big House itself, constituted a sum gaspingly ungraspable to the country-side.

Everything was large-scale but modern to the last tick of the clock. His managers lived, rent-free, with salaries commensurate to ability, in five – and ten-thousand-dollar houses – but they were the cream of specialists skimmed from the continent from the Atlantic to the Pacific. When he ordered gasoline-tractors for the cultivation of the flat lands, he ordered a round score. When he dammed water in his mountains he dammed it by the hundreds of millions of gallons. When he ditched his tule-swamps, instead of contracting the excavation, he bought the huge dredgers outright, and, when there was slack work on his own marshes, he contracted for the draining of the marshes of neighboring big farmers, land companies, and corporations for a hundred miles up and down the Sacramento River.

He had brain sufficient to know the need of buying brains and to pay a tidy bit over the current market price for the most capable brains. And he had brain sufficient to direct the brains he bought to a profitable conclusion.

And yet, he was just turned forty was clear-eyed, calm-

hearted, hearty-pulsed, man-strong; and yet, his history, until he was thirty, had been harum-scarum and erratic to the superlative. He had run away from a millionaire home when he was thirteen. He had won enviable college honors ere he was twenty-one and after that he had known all the purple ports of the purple seas, and, with cool head, hot heart, and laughter, played every risk that promised and provided in the wild world of adventure that he had lived to see pass under the sobriety of law.

In the old days of San Francisco Forrest had been a name to conjure with. The Forrest Mansion had been one of the pioneer palaces on Nob Hill where dwelt the Floods, the Mackays, the Crockers, and the O'Briens. "Lucky" Richard Forrest, the father, had arrived, via the Isthmus, straight from old New England, keenly commercial, interested before his departure in clipper ships and the building of clipper ships, and interested immediately after his arrival in water-front real estate, river steamboats, mines, of course, and, later, in the draining of the Nevada Comstock and the construction of the Southern Pacific.

He played big, he won big, he lost big; but he won always more than he lost, and what he paid out at one game with one hand, he drew back with his other hand at another game. His winnings from the Comstock he sank into the various holes of the bottomless Daffodil Group in Eldorado County. The wreckage from the Benicia Line he turned into the Napa Consolidated, which was a quicksilver venture, and it earned him five thousand per cent. What he lost in the collapse of the Stockton boom was

more than balanced by the realty appreciation of his key-holdings at Sacramento and Oakland.

And, to cap it all, when "Lucky" Richard Forrest had lost everything in a series of calamities, so that San Francisco debated what price his Nob Hill palace would fetch at auction, he grubstaked one, Del Nelson, to a prospecting in Mexico. As soberly set down in history, the result of the said Del Nelson's search for quartz was the Harvest Group, including the fabulous and inexhaustible Tattlesnake, Voice, City, Desdemona, Bullfrog, and Yellow Boy claims. Del Nelson, astounded by his achievement, within the year drowned himself in an enormous quantity of cheap whisky, and, the will being incontestible through lack of kith and kin, left his half to Lucky Richard Forrest.

Dick Forrest was the son of his father. Lucky Richard, a man of boundless energy and enterprise, though twice married and twice widowed, had not been blessed with children. His third marriage occurred in 1872, when he was fifty-eight, and in 1874, although he lost the mother, a twelve-pound boy, stout-barreled and husky-lunged, remained to be brought up by a regiment of nurses in the palace on Nob Hill.

Young Dick was precocious. Lucky Richard was a democrat. Result: Young Dick learned in a year from a private teacher what would have required three years in the grammar school, and used all of the saved years in playing in the open air. Also, result of precocity of son and democracy of father, Young Dick was sent

to grammar school for the last year in order to learn shoulder-rubbing democracy with the sons and daughters of workmen, tradesmen, saloon-keepers and politicians.

In class recitation or spelling match his father's millions did not aid him in competing with Patsy Halloran, the mathematical prodigy whose father was a hod-carrier, nor with Mona Sanguinetti who was a wizard at spelling and whose widowed mother ran a vegetable store. Nor were his father's millions and the Nob Hill palace of the slightest assistance to Young Dick when he peeled his jacket and, bareknuckled, without rounds, licking or being licked, milled it to a finish with Jimmy Botts, Jean Choyinsky, and the rest of the lads that went out over the world to glory and cash a few years later, a generation of prizefighters that only San Francisco, raw and virile and yeasty and young, could have produced.

The wisest thing Lucky Richard did for his boy was to give him this democratic tutelage. In his secret heart, Young Dick never forgot that he lived in a palace of many servants and that his father was a man of power and honor. On the other hand, Young Dick learned two-legged, two-fisted democracy. He learned it when Mona Sanguinetti spelled him down in class. He learned it when Berney Miller out-dodged and out-ran him when running across in Black Man.

And when Tim Hagan, with straight left for the hundredth time to bleeding nose and mangled mouth, and with ever reiterant right hook to stomach, had him dazed and reeling, the breath

whistling and sobbing through his lacerated lips – was no time for succor from palaces and bank accounts. On his two legs, with his two fists, it was either he or Tim. And it was right there, in sweat and blood and iron of soul, that Young Dick learned how not to lose a losing fight. It had been uphill from the first blow, but he stuck it out until in the end it was agreed that neither could best the other, although this agreement was not reached until they had first lain on the ground in nausea and exhaustion and with streaming eyes wept their rage and defiance at each other. After that, they became chums and between them ruled the schoolyard.

Lucky Richard died the same month Young Dick emerged from grammar school. Young Dick was thirteen years old, with twenty million dollars, and without a relative in the world to trouble him. He was the master of a palace of servants, a steam yacht, stables, and, as well, of a summer palace down the Peninsula in the nabob colony at Menlo. One thing, only, was he burdened with: guardians.

On a summer afternoon, in the big library, he attended the first session of his board of guardians. There were three of them, all elderly, and successful, all legal, all business comrades of his father. Dick's impression, as they explained things to him, was that, although they meant well, he had no contacts with them. In his judgment, their boyhood was too far behind them. Besides that, it was patent that him, the particular boy they were so much concerned with, they did not understand at all. Furthermore, in his own sure way he decided that he was the one person in the

world fitted to know what was best for himself.

Mr. Crockett made a long speech, to which Dick listened with alert and becoming attention, nodding his head whenever he was directly addressed or appealed to. Messrs. Davidson and Slocum also had their say and were treated with equal consideration. Among other things, Dick learned what a sterling, upright man his father had been, and the program already decided upon by the three gentlemen which would make him into a sterling and upright man.

When they were quite done, Dick took it upon himself to say a few things.

"I have thought it over," he announced, "and first of all I shall go traveling."

"That will come afterward, my boy," Mr. Slocum explained soothingly. "When – say – when you are ready to enter the university. At that time a year abroad would be a very good thing… a very good thing indeed."

"Of course," Mr. Davidson volunteered quickly, having noted the annoyed light in the lad's eyes and the unconscious firm-drawing and setting of the lips, "of course, in the meantime you could do some traveling, a limited amount of traveling, during your school vacations. I am sure my fellow guardians will agree – under the proper management and safeguarding, of course – that such bits of travel sandwiched between your school-terms, would be advisable and beneficial."

"How much did you say I am worth?" Dick asked with

apparent irrelevance.

"Twenty millions – at a most conservative estimate – that is about the sum," Mr. Crockett answered promptly.

"Suppose I said right now that I wanted a hundred dollars!" Dick went on.

"Why – er – ahem." Mr. Slocum looked about him for guidance.

"We would be compelled to ask what you wanted it for," answered Mr. Crockett.

"And suppose," Dick said very slowly, looking Mr. Crockett squarely in the eyes, "suppose I said that I was very sorry, but that I did not care to say what I wanted it for?"

"Then you wouldn't get it," Mr. Crockett said so immediately that there was a hint of testiness and snap in his manner.

Dick nodded slowly, as if letting the information sink in.

"But, of course, my boy," Mr. Slocum took up hastily, "you understand you are too young to handle money yet. We must decide that for you."

"You mean I can't touch a penny without your permission?"

"Not a penny," Mr. Crockett snapped.

Dick nodded his head thoughtfully and murmured, "Oh, I see."

"Of course, and quite naturally, it would only be fair, you know, you will have a small allowance for your personal spending," Mr. Davidson said. "Say, a dollar, or, perhaps, two dollars, a week. As you grow older this allowance will be

increased. And by the time you are twenty-one, doubtlessly you will be fully qualified – with advice, of course – to handle your own affairs."

"And until I am twenty-one my twenty million wouldn't buy me a hundred dollars to do as I please with?" Dick queried very subduedly.

Mr. Davidson started to corroborate in soothing phrases, but was waved to silence by Dick, who continued:

"As I understand it, whatever money I handle will be by agreement between the four of us?"

The Board of Guardians nodded.

"That is, whatever we agree, goes?"

Again the Board of Guardians nodded.

"Well, I'd like to have a hundred right now," Dick announced.

"What for?" Mr. Crockett demanded.

"I don't mind telling you," was the lad's steady answer. "To go traveling."

"You'll go to bed at eight: thirty this evening," Mr. Crockett retorted. "And you don't get any hundred. The lady we spoke to you about will be here before six. She is to have, as we explained, daily and hourly charge of you. At six-thirty, as usual, you will dine, and she will dine with you and see you to bed. As we told you, she will have to serve the place of a mother to you – see that your ears are clean, your neck washed – "

"And that I get my Saturday night bath," Dick amplified meekly for him.

"Precisely."

"How much are you – am I – paying the lady for her services?" Dick questioned in the disconcerting, tangential way that was already habitual to him, as his school companions and teachers had learned to their cost.

Mr. Crockett for the first time cleared his throat for pause.

"I'm paying her, ain't I?" Dick prodded. "Out of the twenty million, you know."

"The spit of his father," said Mr. Slocum in an aside.

"Mrs. Summerstone, the lady as you elect to call her, receives one hundred and fifty a month, eighteen hundred a year in round sum," said Mr. Crockett.

"It's a waste of perfectly good money," Dick sighed. "And board and lodging thrown in!"

He stood up – not the born aristocrat of the generations, but the reared aristocrat of thirteen years in the Nob Hill palace. He stood up with such a manner that his Board of Guardians left their leather chairs to stand up with him. But he stood up as no Lord Fauntleroy ever stood up; for he was a mixer. He had knowledge that human life was many-faced and many-placed. Not for nothing had he been spelled down by Mona Sanguinetti. Not for nothing had he fought Tim Hagan to a standstill and, co-equal, ruled the schoolyard roost with him.

He was birthed of the wild gold-adventure of Forty-nine. He was a reared aristocrat and a grammar-school-trained democrat. He knew, in his precocious immature way, the differentiations

between caste and mass; and, behind it all, he was possessed of a will of his own and of a quiet surety of self that was incomprehensible to the three elderly gentlemen who had been given charge of his and his destiny and who had pledged themselves to increase his twenty millions and make a man of him in their own composite image.

"Thank you for your kindness," Young Dick said generally to the three. "I guess we'll get along all right. Of course, that twenty millions is mine, and of course you've got to take care of it for me, seeing I know nothing of business – "

"And we'll increase it for you, my boy, we'll increase it for you in safe, conservative ways," Mr. Slocum assured him.

"No speculation," Young Dick warned. "Dad's just been lucky – I've heard him say that times have changed and a fellow can't take the chances everybody used to take."

From which, and from much which has already passed, it might erroneously be inferred that Young Dick was a mean and money-grubbing soul. On the contrary, he was at that instant entertaining secret thoughts and plans so utterly regardless and disdainful of his twenty millions as to place him on a par with a drunken sailor sowing the beach with a three years' pay-day.

"I am only a boy," Young Dick went on. "But you don't know me very well yet. We'll get better acquainted by and by, and, again thanking you…"

He paused, bowed briefly and grandly as lords in Nob Hill palaces early learn to bow, and, by the quality of the pause,

signified that the audience was over. Nor did the impact of dismissal miss his guardians. They, who had been co-lords with his father, withdrew confused and perplexed. Messrs. Davidson and Slocum were on the point of resolving their perplexity into wrath, as they went down the great stone stairway to the waiting carriage, but Mr. Crockett, the testy and snappish, muttered ecstatically: "The son of a gun! The little son of a gun!"

The carriage carried them down to the old Pacific Union Club, where, for another hour, they gravely discussed the future of Young Dick Forrest and pledged themselves anew to the faith reposed in them by Lucky Richard Forrest. And down the hill, on foot, where grass grew on the paved streets too steep for horse-traffic, Young Dick hurried. As the height of land was left behind, almost immediately the palaces and spacious grounds of the nabobs gave way to the mean streets and wooden warrens of the working people. The San Francisco of 1887 as incontinently intermingled its slums and mansions as did the old cities of Europe. Nob Hill arose, like any medieval castle, from the mess and ruck of common life that denned and laired at its base.

Young Dick came to pause alongside a corner grocery, the second story of which was rented to Timothy Hagan Senior, who, by virtue of being a policeman with a wage of a hundred dollars a month, rented this high place to dwell above his fellows who supported families on no more than forty and fifty dollars a month.

In vain Young Dick whistled up through the unscreened,

open windows. Tim Hagan Junior was not at home. But Young Dick wasted little wind in the whistling. He was debating on possible adjacent places where Tim Hagan might be, when Tim himself appeared around the corner, bearing a lidless lard-can that foamed with steam beer. He grunted greeting, and Young Dick grunted with equal roughness, just as if, a brief space before, he had not, in most lordly fashion, terminated an audience with three of the richest merchant-kings of an imperial city. Nor did his possession of twenty increasing millions hint the slightest betrayal in his voice or mitigate in the slightest the gruffness of his grunt.

"Ain't seen yeh since yer old man died," Tim Hagan commented.

"Well, you're seein' me now, ain't you?" was Young Dick's retort. "Say, Tim, I come to see you on business."

"Wait till I rush the beer to the old man," said Tim, inspecting the state of the foam in the lard-can with an experienced eye. "He'll roar his head off if it comes in flat."

"Oh, you can shake it up," Young Dick assured him. "Only want to see you a minute. I'm hitting the road to-night. Want to come along?"

Tim's small, blue Irish eyes flashed with interest.

"Where to?" he queried.

"Don't know. Want to come? If you do, we can talk it over after we start? You know the ropes. What d'ye say?"

"The old man'll beat the stuffin' outa me," Tim demurred.

"He's done that before, an' you don't seem to be much missing," Young Dick callously rejoined. "Say the word, an' we'll meet at the Ferry Building at nine to-night. What d'ye say? I'll be there."

"Supposin' I don't show up?" Tim asked.

"I'll be on my way just the same." Young Dick turned as if to depart, paused casually, and said over his shoulder, "Better come along."

Tim shook up the beer as he answered with equal casualness, "Aw right.

I'll be there."

After parting from Tim Hagan Young Dick spent a busy hour or so looking up one, Marcovich, a Slavonian schoolmate whose father ran a chop-house in which was reputed to be served the finest twenty-cent meal in the city. Young Marcovich owed Young Dick two dollars, and Young Dick accepted the payment of a dollar and forty cents as full quittance of the debt.

Also, with shyness and perturbation, Young Dick wandered down Montgomery Street and vacillated among the many pawnshops that graced that thoroughfare. At last, diving desperately into one, he managed to exchange for eight dollars and a ticket his gold watch that he knew was worth fifty at the very least.

Dinner in the Nob Hill palace was served at six-thirty. He arrived at six-forty-five and encountered Mrs. Summerstone. She was a stout, elderly, decayed gentlewoman, a daughter of the

great Porter-Rickington family that had shaken the entire Pacific Coast with its financial crash in the middle seventies. Despite her stoutness, she suffered from what she called shattered nerves.

"This will never, never do, Richard," she censured. "Here is dinner waiting fifteen minutes already, and you have not yet washed your face and hands."

"I am sorry, Mrs. Summerstone," Young Dick apologized. "I won't keep you waiting ever again. And I won't bother you much ever."

At dinner, in state, the two of them alone in the great dining room, Young Dick strove to make things easy for the lady, whom, despite his knowledge that she was on his pay-roll, he felt toward as a host must feel toward a guest.

"You'll be very comfortable here," he promised, "once you are settled down. It's a good old house, and most of the servants have been here for years."

"But, Richard," she smiled seriously to him; "it is not the servants who will determine my happiness here. It is you."

"I'll do my best," he said graciously. "Better than that. I'm sorry I came in late for dinner. In years and years you'll never see me late again. I won't bother you at all. You'll see. It will be just as though I wasn't in the house."

When he bade her good night, on his way to bed, he added, as a last thought:

"I'll warn you of one thing: Ah Sing. He's the cook. He's been in our house for years and years – oh, I don't know, maybe

twenty-five or thirty years he's cooked for father, from long before this house was built or I was born. He's privileged. He's so used to having his own way that you'll have to handle him with gloves. But once he likes you he'll work his fool head off to please you. He likes me that way. You get him to like you, and you'll have the time of your life here. And, honest, I won't give you any trouble at all. It'll be a regular snap, just as if I wasn't here at all."

Chapter V

At nine in the evening, sharp to the second, clad in his oldest clothes, Young Dick met Tim Hagan at the Ferry Building.

"No use headin' north," said Tim. "Winter'll come on up that way and make the sleepin' crimpy. D'ye want to go East – that means Nevada and the deserts."

"Any other way?" queried Young Dick. "What's the matter with south? We can head for Los Angeles, an' Arizona, an' New Mexico – oh, an' Texas."

"How much money you got?" Tim demanded.

"What for?" Young Dick countered.

"We gotta get out quick, an' payin' our way at the start is quickest. Me – I'm all hunkydory; but you ain't. The folks that's lookin' after you'll raise a roar. They'll have more detectives out than you can shake at stick at. We gotta dodge 'em, that's what."

"Then we will dodge," said Young Dick. "We'll make short jumps this way and that for a couple of days, layin' low most of the time, paying our way, until we can get to Tracy. Then we'll quit payin' an' beat her south."

All of which program was carefully carried out. They eventually went through Tracy as pay passengers, six hours after the local deputy sheriff had given up his task of searching the trains. With an excess of precaution Young Dick paid beyond Tracy and as far as Modesto. After that, under the teaching

of Tim, he traveled without paying, riding blind baggage, box cars, and cow-catchers. Young Dick bought the newspapers, and frightened Tim by reading to him the lurid accounts of the kidnapping of the young heir to the Forrest millions.

Back in San Francisco the Board of Guardians offered rewards that totaled thirty thousand dollars for the recovery of their ward. And Tim Hagan, reading the same while they lay in the grass by some water-tank, branded forever the mind of Young Dick with the fact that honor beyond price was a matter of neither place nor caste and might outcrop in the palace on the height of land or in the dwelling over a grocery down on the flat.

"Gee!" Tim said to the general landscape. "The old man wouldn't raise a roar if I snitched on you for that thirty thousand. It makes me scared to think of it."

And from the fact that Tim thus openly mentioned the matter, Young Dick concluded that there was no possibility of the policeman's son betraying him.

Not until six weeks afterward, in Arizona, did Young Dick bring up the subject.

"You see, Tim," he said, "I've got slathers of money. It's growing all the time, and I ain't spending a cent of it, not so as you can notice… though that Mrs. Summerstone is getting a cold eighteen hundred a year out of me, with board and carriages thrown in, while you an' I are glad to get the leavings of firemen's pails in the round-houses. Just the same, my money's growing. What's ten per cent, on twenty dollars?"

Tim Hagan stared at the shimmering heat-waves of the desert and tried to solve the problem.

"What's one-tenth of twenty million?" Young Dick demanded irritably.

"Huh! – two million, of course."

"Well, five per cent's half of ten per cent. What does twenty million earn at five per cent, for one year?"

Tim hesitated.

"Half of it, half of two million!" Young Dick cried. "At that rate I'm a million richer every year. Get that, and hang on to it, and listen to me. When I'm good and willing to go back – but not for years an' years – we'll fix it up, you and I. When I say the word, you'll write to your father. He'll jump out to where we are waiting, pick me up, and cart me back. Then he'll collect the thirty thousand reward from my guardians, quit the police force, and most likely start a saloon."

"Thirty thousand's a hell of a lot of money," was Tim's nonchalant way of expressing his gratitude.

"Not to me," Young Dick minimized his generosity. "Thirty thousand goes into a million thirty-three times, and a million's only a year's turnover of my money."

But Tim Hagan never lived to see his father a saloon keeper. Two days later, on a trestle, the lads were fired out of an empty box-car by a brake-man who should have known better. The trestle spanned a dry ravine. Young Dick looked down at the rocks seventy feet below and demurred.

"There's room on the trestle," he said; "but what if the train starts up?"

"It ain't goin' to start – beat it while you got time," the brakeman insisted. "The engine's takin' water at the other side. She always takes it here."

But for once the engine did not take water. The evidence at the inquest developed that the engineer had found no water in the tank and started on. Scarcely had the two boys dropped from the side-door of the box-car, and before they had made a score of steps along the narrow way between the train and the abyss, than the train began to move. Young Dick, quick and sure in all his perceptions and adjustments, dropped on the instant to hands and knees on the trestle. This gave him better holding and more space, because he crouched beneath the overhang of the box-cars. Tim, not so quick in perceiving and adjusting, also overcome with Celtic rage at the brakeman, instead of dropping to hands and knees, remained upright to flare his opinion of the brakeman, to the brakeman, in lurid and ancestral terms.

"Get down! – drop!" Young Dick shouted.

But the opportunity had passed. On a down grade, the engine picked up the train rapidly. Facing the moving cars, with empty air at his back and the depth beneath, Tim tried to drop on hands and knees. But the first twist of his shoulders brought him in contact with the car and nearly out-balanced him. By a miracle he recovered equilibrium. But he stood upright. The train was moving faster and faster. It was impossible to get down.

Young Dick, kneeling and holding, watched. The train gathered way. The cars moved more swiftly. Tim, with a cool head, his back to the fall, his face to the passing cars, his arms by his sides, with nowhere save under his feet a holding point, balanced and swayed. The faster the train moved, the wider he swayed, until, exerting his will, he controlled himself and ceased from swaying.

And all would have been well with him, had it not been for one car. Young Dick knew it, and saw it coming. It was a "palace horse-car," projecting six inches wider than any car on the train. He saw Tim see it coming. He saw Tim steel himself to meet the abrupt subtraction of half a foot from the narrow space wherein he balanced. He saw Tim slowly and deliberately sway out, sway out to the extremest limit, and yet not sway out far enough. The thing was physically inevitable. An inch more, and Tim would have escaped the car. An inch more and he would have fallen without impact from the car. It caught him, in that margin of an inch, and hurled him backward and side-twisting. Twice he whirled sidewise, and two and a half times he turned over, ere he struck on his head and neck on the rocks.

He never moved after he struck. The seventy-foot fall broke his neck and crushed his skull. And right there Young Dick learned death – not the ordered, decent death of civilization, wherein doctors and nurses and hypodermics ease the stricken one into the darkness, and ceremony and function and flowers and undertaking institutions conspire to give a happy leave-taking

and send-off to the departing shade, but sudden death, primitive death, ugly and ungarnished, like the death of a steer in the shambles or a fat swine stuck in the jugular.

And right there Young Dick learned more – the mischance of life and fate; the universe hostile to man; the need to perceive and to act, to see and know, to be sure and quick, to adjust instantly to all instant shiftage of the balance of forces that bear upon the living. And right there, beside the strangely crumpled and shrunken remnant of what had been his comrade the moment before, Young Dick learned that illusion must be discounted, and that reality never lied.

In New Mexico, Young Dick drifted into the Jingle-bob Ranch, north of Roswell, in the Pecos Valley. He was not yet fourteen, and he was accepted as the mascot of the ranch and made into a "sure-enough" cowboy by cowboys who, on legal papers, legally signed names such as Wild Horse, Willie Buck, Boomer Deacon, and High Pockets.

Here, during a stay of six months, Young Dick, soft of frame and unbreakable, achieved a knowledge of horses and horsemanship, and of men in the rough and raw, that became a life asset. More he learned. There was John Chisum, owner of the Jingle-bob, the Bosque Grande, and of other cattle ranches as far away as the Black River and beyond. John Chisum was a cattle king who had foreseen the coming of the farmer and adjusted from the open range to barbed wire, and who, in order to do so, had purchased every forty acres carrying water and got

for nothing the use of the millions of acres of adjacent range that was worthless without the water he controlled. And in the talk by the camp-fire and chuck wagon, among forty-dollar-a-month cowboys who had not foreseen what John Chisum foresaw, Young Dick learned precisely why and how John Chisum had become a cattle king while a thousand of his contemporaries worked for him on wages.

But Young Dick was no cool-head. His blood was hot. He had passion, and fire, and male pride. Ready to cry from twenty hours in the saddle, he learned to ignore the thousand aching creaks in his body and with the stoic brag of silence to withstrain from his blankets until the hard-bitten punchers led the way. By the same token he straddled the horse that was apportioned him, insisted on riding night-herd, and knew no hint of uncertainty when it came to him to turn the flank of a stampede with a flying slicker. He could take a chance. It was his joy to take a chance. But at such times he never failed of due respect for reality. He was well aware that men were soft-shelled and cracked easily on hard rocks or under pounding hoofs. And when he rejected a mount that tangled its legs in quick action and stumbled, it was not because he feared to be cracked, but because, when he took a chance on being cracked, he wanted, as he told John Chisum himself, "an even break for his money."

It was while at the Jingle-bob, but mailed by a cattleman from Chicago, that Young Dick wrote a letter to his guardians. Even then, so careful was he, that the envelope was addressed

to Ah Sing. Though unburdened by his twenty millions, Young Dick never forgot them, and, fearing his estate might be distributed among remote relatives who might possibly inhabit New England, he warned his guardians that he was still alive and that he would return home in several years. Also, he ordered them to keep Mrs. Summerstone on at her regular salary.

But Young Dick's feet itched. Half a year, he felt, was really more than he should have spent at the Jingle-bob. As a boy hobo, or road-kid, he drifted on across the United States, getting acquainted with its peace officers, police judges, vagrancy laws, and jails. And he learned vagrants themselves at first hand, and floating laborers and petty criminals. Among other things, he got acquainted with farms and farmers, and, in New York State, once picked berries for a week with a Dutch farmer who was experimenting with one of the first silos erected in the United States. Nothing of what he learned came to him in the spirit of research. He had merely the human boy's curiosity about all things, and he gained merely a huge mass of data concerning human nature and social conditions that was to stand him in good stead in later years, when, with the aid of the books, he digested and classified it.

His adventures did not harm him. Even when he consorted with jail-birds in jungle camps, and listened to their codes of conduct and measurements of life, he was not affected. He was a traveler, and they were alien breeds. Secure in the knowledge of his twenty millions, there was neither need nor temptation for

him to steal or rob. All things and all places interested him, but he never found a place nor a situation that could hold him. He wanted to see, to see more and more, and to go on seeing.

At the end of three years, nearly sixteen, hard of body, weighing a hundred and thirty pounds, he judged it time to go home and open the books. So he took his first long voyage, signing on as boy on a windjammer bound around the Horn from the Delaware Breakwater to San Francisco. It was a hard voyage, of one hundred and eighty days, but at the end he weighed ten pounds the more for having made it.

Mrs. Summerstone screamed when he walked in on her, and Ah Sing had to be called from the kitchen to identify him. Mrs. Summerstone screamed a second time. It was when she shook hands with him and lacerated her tender skin in the fisty grip of his rope-calloused palms.

He was shy, almost embarrassed, as he greeted his guardians at the hastily summoned meeting. But this did not prevent him from talking straight to the point.

"It's this way," he said. "I am not a fool. I know what I want, and I want what I want. I am alone in the world, outside of good friends like you, of course, and I have my own ideas of the world and what I want to do in it. I didn't come home because of a sense of duty to anybody here. I came home because it was time, because of my sense of duty to myself. I'm all the better from my three years of wandering about, and now it's up to me to go on with my education – my book education, I mean."

"The Belmont Academy," Mr. Slocum suggested. "That will fit you for the university – "

Dick shook his head decidedly.

"And take three years to do it. So would a high school. I intend to be in the University of California inside one year. That means work. But my mind's like acid. It'll bite into the books. I shall hire a coach, or half a dozen of them, and go to it. And I'll hire my coaches myself – hire and fire them. And that means money to handle."

"A hundred a month," Mr. Crockett suggested.

Dick shook his head.

"I've taken care of myself for three years without any of my money. I guess. I can take care of myself along with some of my money here in San Francisco. I don't care to handle my business affairs yet, but I do want a bank account, a respectable-sized one. I want to spend it as I see fit, for what I see fit."

The guardians looked their dismay at one another.

"It's ridiculous, impossible," Mr. Crockett began. "You are as unreasonable as you were before you went away."

"It's my way, I guess," Dick sighed. "The other disagreement was over my money. It was a hundred dollars I wanted then."

"Think of our position, Dick," Mr. Davidson urged. "As your guardians, how would it be looked upon if we gave you, a lad of sixteen, a free hand with money."

"What's the *Freda* worth, right now?" Dick demanded irrelevantly.

"Can sell for twenty thousand any time," Mr. Crockett answered.

"Then sell her. She's too large for me, and she's worth less every year. I want a thirty-footer that I can handle myself for knocking around the Bay, and that won't cost a thousand. Sell the *Freda* and put the money to my account. Now what you three are afraid of is that I'll misspend my money – taking to drinking, horse-racing, and running around with chorus girls. Here's my proposition to make you easy on that: let it be a drawing account for the four of us. The moment any of you decide I am misspending, that moment you can draw out the total balance. I may as well tell you, that just as a side line I'm going to get a business college expert to come here and cram me with the mechanical side of the business game."

Dick did not wait for their acquiescence, but went on as from a matter definitely settled.

"How about the horses down at Menlo? – never mind, I'll look them over and decide what to keep. Mrs. Summerstone will stay on here in charge of the house, because I've got too much work mapped out for myself already. I promise you you won't regret giving me a free hand with my directly personal affairs. And now, if you want to hear about the last three years, I'll spin the yarn for you."

Dick Forrest had been right when he told his guardians that his mind was acid and would bite into the books. Never was there such an education, and he directed it himself – but not

without advice. He had learned the trick of hiring brains from his father and from John Chisum of the Jingle-bob. He had learned to sit silent and to think while cow men talked long about the campfire and the chuck wagon. And, by virtue of name and place, he sought and obtained interviews with professors and college presidents and practical men of affairs; and he listened to their talk through many hours, scarcely speaking, rarely asking a question, merely listening to the best they had to offer, content to receive from several such hours one idea, one fact, that would help him to decide what sort of an education he would go in for and how.

Then came the engaging of coaches. Never was there such an engaging and discharging, such a hiring and firing. He was not frugal in the matter. For one that he retained a month, or three months, he discharged a dozen on the first day, or the first week. And invariably he paid such dischargees a full month although their attempts to teach him might not have consumed an hour. He did such things fairly and grandly, because he could afford to be fair and grand.

He, who had eaten the leavings from firemen's pails in round-houses and "scoffed" mulligan-stews at water-tanks, had learned thoroughly the worth of money. He bought the best with the sure knowledge that it was the cheapest. A year of high school physics and a year of high school chemistry were necessary to enter the university. When he had crammed his algebra and geometry, he sought out the heads of the physics and chemistry departments in

the University of California. Professor Carey laughed at him… at the first.

"My dear boy," Professor Carey began.

Dick waited patiently till he was through. Then Dick began, and concluded.

"I'm not a fool, Professor Carey. High school and academy students are children. They don't know the world. They don't know what they want, or why they want what is ladled out to them. I know the world. I know what I want and why I want it. They do physics for an hour, twice a week, for two terms, which, with two vacations, occupy one year. You are the top teacher on the Pacific Coast in physics. The college year is just ending. In the first week of your vacation, giving every minute of your time to me, I can get the year's physics. What is that week worth to you?"

"You couldn't buy it for a thousand dollars," Professor Carey rejoined, thinking he had settled the matter.

"I know what your salary is – " Dick began.

"What is it?" Professor Carey demanded sharply.

"It's not a thousand a week," Dick retorted as sharply. "It's not five hundred a week, nor two-fifty a week – " He held up his hand to stall off interruption. "You've just told me I couldn't buy a week of your time for a thousand dollars. I'm not going to. But I am going to buy that week for two thousand. Heavens! – I've only got so many years to live – "

"And you can buy years?" Professor Carey queried slyly.

"Sure. That's why I'm here. I buy three years in one, and the week from you is part of the deal."

"But I have not accepted," Professor Carey laughed.

"If the sum is not sufficient," Dick said stiffly, "why name the sum you consider fair."

And Professor Carey surrendered. So did Professor Barsdale, head of the department of chemistry.

Already had Dick taken his coaches in mathematics duck hunting for weeks in the sloughs of the Sacramento and the San Joaquin. After his bout with physics and chemistry he took his two coaches in literature and history into the Curry County hunting region of southwestern Oregon. He had learned the trick from his father, and he worked, and played, lived in the open air, and did three conventional years of adolescent education in one year without straining himself. He fished, hunted, swam, exercised, and equipped himself for the university at the same time. And he made no mistake. He knew that he did it because his father's twenty millions had invested him with mastery. Money was a tool. He did not over-rate it, nor under-rate it. He used it to buy what he wanted.

"The weirdest form of dissipation I ever heard," said Mr. Crockett, holding up Dick's account for the year. "Sixteen thousand for education, all itemized, including railroad fares, porters' tips, and shot-gun cartridges for his teachers."

"He passed the examinations just the same," quoth Mr. Slocum.

"And in a year," growled Mr. Davidson. "My daughter's boy entered Belmont at the same time, and, if he's lucky, it will be two years yet before he enters the university."

"Well, all I've got to say," proclaimed Mr. Crockett, "is that from now on what that boy says in the matter of spending his money goes."

"And now I'll have a snap," Dick told his guardians. "Here I am, neck and neck again, and years ahead of them in knowledge of the world. Why, I know things, good and bad, big and little, about men and women and life that sometimes I almost doubt myself that they're true. But I know them.

"From now on, I'm not going to rush. I've caught up, and I'm going through regular. All I have to do is to keep the speed of the classes, and I'll be graduated when I'm twenty-one. From now on I'll need less money for education – no more coaches, you know – and more money for a good time."

Mr. Davidson was suspicious.

"What do you mean by a good time?"

"Oh, I'm going in for the frats, for football, hold my own, you know – and I'm interested in gasoline engines. I'm going to build the first ocean-going gasoline yacht in the world – "

"You'll blow yourself up," Mr. Crockett demurred. "It's a fool notion all these cranks are rushing into over gasoline."

"I'll make myself safe," Dick answered, "and that means experimenting, and it means money, so keep me a good drawing account – same old way – all four of us can draw."

Chapter VI

Dick Forrest proved himself no prodigy at the university, save that he cut more lectures the first year than any other student. The reason for this was that he did not need the lectures he cut, and he knew it. His coaches, while preparing him for the entrance examinations, had carried him nearly through the first college year. Incidentally, he made the Freshman team, a very scrub team, that was beaten by every high school and academy it played against.

But Dick did put in work that nobody saw. His collateral reading was wide and deep, and when he went on his first summer cruise in the ocean-going gasoline yacht he had built no gay young crowd accompanied him. Instead, his guests, with their families, were professors of literature, history, jurisprudence, and philosophy. It was long remembered in the university as the "high-brow" cruise. The professors, on their return, reported a most enjoyable time. Dick returned with a greater comprehension of the general fields of the particular professors than he could have gained in years at their class-lectures. And time thus gained, enabled him to continue to cut lectures and to devote more time to laboratory work.

Nor did he miss having his good college time. College widows made love to him, and college girls loved him, and he was indefatigable in his dancing. He never cut a smoker, a beer bust,

or a rush, and he toured the Pacific Coast with the Banjo and Mandolin Club.

And yet he was no prodigy. He was brilliant at nothing. Half a dozen of his fellows could out-banjo and out-mandolin him. A dozen fellows were adjudged better dancers than he. In football, and he gained the Varsity in his Sophomore year, he was considered a solid and dependable player, and that was all. It seemed never his luck to take the ball and go down the length of the field while the Blue and Gold host tore itself and the grandstand to pieces. But it was at the end of heart-breaking, grueling slog in mud and rain, the score tied, the second half imminent to its close, Stanford on the five-yard line, Berkeley's ball, with two downs and three yards to gain – it was then that the Blue and Gold arose and chanted its demand for Forrest to hit the center and hit it hard.

He never achieved super-excellence at anything. Big Charley Everson drank him down at the beer busts. Harrison Jackson, at hammer-throwing, always exceeded his best by twenty feet. Carruthers out-pointed him at boxing. Anson Burge could always put his shoulders to the mat, two out of three, but always only by the hardest work. In English composition a fifth of his class excelled him. Edlin, the Russian Jew, out-debated him on the contention that property was robbery. Schultz and Debret left him with the class behind in higher mathematics; and Otsuki, the Japanese, was beyond all comparison with him in chemistry.

But if Dick Forrest did not excel at anything, he failed in

nothing. He displayed no superlative strength, he betrayed no weakness nor deficiency. As he told his guardians, who, by his unrelenting good conduct had been led into dreaming some great career for him; as he told them, when they asked what he wanted to become:

"Nothing. Just all around. You see, I don't have to be a specialist. My father arranged that for me when he left me his money. Besides, I couldn't be a specialist if I wanted to. It isn't me."

And thus so well-keyed was he, that he expressed clearly his key. He had no flare for anything. He was that rare individual, normal, average, balanced, all-around.

When Mr. Davidson, in the presence of his fellow guardians, stated his pleasure in that Dick had shown no wildness since he had settled down, Dick replied:

"Oh, I can hold myself when I want to."

"Yes," said Mr. Slocum gravely. "It's the finest thing in the world that you sowed your wild oats early and learned control."

Dick looked at him curiously.

"Why, that boyish adventure doesn't count," he said. "That wasn't wildness. I haven't gone wild yet. But watch me when I start. Do you know Kipling's 'Song of Diego Valdez'? Let me quote you a bit of it. You see, Diego Valdez, like me, had good fortune. He rose so fast to be High Admiral of Spain that he found no time to take the pleasure he had merely tasted. He was lusty and husky, but he had no time, being too busy rising. But

always, he thought, he fooled himself with the thought, that his lustiness and huskiness would last, and, after he became High Admiral he could then have his pleasure. Always he remembered:

"' – comrades —
Old playmates on new seas —
When as we traded orpiment
Among the savages —
A thousand leagues to south'ard
And thirty years removed —
They knew not noble Valdez,
But me they knew and loved.

"'Then they that found good liquor
They drank it not alone,
And they that found fair plunder,
They told us every one,
Behind our chosen islands
Or secret shoals between,
When, walty from far voyage,
We gathered to careen.

"'There burned our breaming-fagots,
All pale along the shore:
There rose our worn pavilions —
A sail above an oar:
As flashed each yearning anchor
Through mellow seas afire,
So swift our careless captains

Rowed each to his desire.

"'Where lay our loosened harness?
Where turned our naked feet?
Whose tavern mid the palm-trees?
What quenchings of what heat?
Oh fountain in the desert!
Oh cistern in the waste!
Oh bread we ate in secret!
Oh cup we spilled in haste!

"'The youth new-taught of longing,
The widow curbed and wan —
The good wife proud at season,
And the maid aware of man;
All souls, unslaked, consuming,
Defrauded in delays,
Desire not more than quittance
Than I those forfeit days!'

"Oh, get him, get him, you three oldsters, as I've got him! Get what he saws next:

"'I dreamed to wait my pleasure,
Unchanged my spring would bide:
Wherefore, to wait my pleasure,
I put my spring aside,
Till, first in face of Fortune,
And last in mazed disdain,

I made Diego Valdez
High Admiral of Spain!'

"Listen to me, guardians!" Dick cried on, his face a flame of passion. "Don't forget for one moment that I am anything but unslaked, consuming. I am. I burn. But I hold myself. Don't think I am a dead one because I am a darn nice, meritorious boy at college. I am young. I am alive. I am all lusty and husky. But I make no mistake. I hold myself. I don't start out now to blow up on the first lap. I am just getting ready. I am going to have my time. I am not going to spill my cup in haste. And in the end I am not going to lament as Diego Valdez did:

"'There walks no wind 'neath heaven
Nor wave that shall restore
The old careening riot
And the clamorous, crowded shore —
The fountain in the desert,
The cistern in the waste,
The bread we ate in secret,
The cup we spilled in haste.'

"Listen, guardians! Do you know what it is to hit your man, to hit him in hot blood – square to the jaw – and drop him cold? I want that. And I want to love, and kiss, and risk, and play the lusty, husky fool. I want to take my chance. I want my careening riot, and I want it while I am young, but not while I am too young.

And I'm going to have it. And in the meantime I play the game at college, I hold myself, I equip myself, so that when I turn loose I am going to have the best chance of my best. Oh, believe me, I do not always sleep well of nights."

"You mean?" queried Mr. Crockett.

"Sure. That's just what I mean. I haven't gone wild yet, but just watch me when I start."

"And you will start when you graduate?"

The remarkable youngster shook his head.

"After I graduate I'm going to take at least a year of post-graduate courses in the College of Agriculture. You see, I'm developing a hobby – farming. I want to do something … something constructive. My father wasn't constructive to amount to anything. Neither were you fellows. You struck a new land in pioneer days, and you picked up money like a lot of sailors shaking out nuggets from the grass roots in a virgin placer – "

"My lad, I've some little experience in Californian farming," Mr. Crockett interrupted in a hurt way.

"Sure you have, but you weren't constructive. You were – well, facts are facts – you were destructive. You were a bonanza farmer. What did you do? You took forty thousand acres of the finest Sacramento Valley soil and you grew wheat on it year after year. You never dreamed of rotation. You burned your straw. You exhausted your humus. You plowed four inches and put a plow-sole like a cement sidewalk just four inches under the surface. You exhausted that film of four inches and now you can't

get your seed back.

"You've destroyed. That's what my father did. They all did it. Well, I'm going to take my father's money and construct. I'm going to take worked-out wheat-land that I can buy as at a fire-sale, rip out the plow-sole, and make it produce more in the end than it did when you fellows first farmed it."

It was at the end of his Junior year that Mr. Crockett again mentioned Dick's threatened period of wildness.

"Soon as I'm done with cow college," was his answer. "Then I'm going to buy, and stock, and start a ranch that'll be a ranch. And then I'll set out after my careening riot."

"About how large a ranch will you start with?" Mr. Davidson asked.

"Maybe fifty thousand acres, maybe five hundred thousand. It all depends. I'm going to play unearned increment to the limit. People haven't begun to come to California yet. Without a tap of my hand or a turn over, fifteen years from now land that I can buy for ten dollars an acre will be worth fifty, and what I can buy for fifty will be worth five hundred."

"A half million acres at ten dollars an acre means five million dollars," Mr. Crockett warned gravely.

"And at fifty it means twenty-five million," Dick laughed.

But his guardians never believed in the wild oats pilgrimage he threatened. He might waste his fortune on new-fangled farming, but to go literally wild after such years of self-restraint was an unthinkable thing.

Dick took his sheepskin with small honor. He was twenty-eighth in his class, and he had not set the college world afire. His most notable achievement had been his resistance and bafflement of many nice girls and of the mothers of many nice girls. Next, after that, he had signalized his Senior year by captaining the Varsity to its first victory over Stanford in five years. It was in the day prior to large-salaried football coaches, when individual play meant much; but he hammered team-work and the sacrifice of the individual into his team, so that on Thanksgiving Day, over a vastly more brilliant eleven, the Blue and Gold was able to serpentine its triumph down Market Street in San Francisco.

In his post-graduate year in cow college, Dick devoted himself to laboratory work and cut all lectures. In fact, he hired his own lecturers, and spent a sizable fortune on them in mere traveling expenses over California. Jacques Ribot, esteemed one of the greatest world authorities on agricultural chemistry, who had been seduced from his two thousand a year in France by the six thousand offered by the University of California, who had been seduced to Hawaii by the ten thousand of the sugar planters, Dick Forrest seduced with fifteen thousand and the more delectable temperate climate of California on a five years' contract.

Messrs. Crockett, Slocum, and Davidson threw up their hands in horror and knew that this was the wild career Dick Forrest had forecast.

But this was only one of Dick Forrest's similar dissipations. He stole from the Federal Government, at a prodigal increase

of salary, its star specialist in livestock breeding, and by similar misconduct he robbed the University of Nebraska of its greatest milch cow professor, and broke the heart of the Dean of the College of Agriculture of the University of California by appropriating Professor Nirdenhammer, the wizard of farm management.

"Cheap at the price, cheap at the price," Dick explained to his guardians. "Wouldn't you rather see me spend my money in buying professors than in buying race horses and actresses? Besides, the trouble with you fellows is that you don't know the game of buying brains. I do. That's my specialty. I'm going to make money out of them, and, better than that, I'm going to make a dozen blades of grass grow where you fellows didn't leave room for half a blade in the soil you gutted."

So it can be understood how his guardians could not believe in his promise of wild career, of kissing and risking, and hitting men hot on the jaw. "One year more," he warned, while he delved in agricultural chemistry, soil analysis, farm management, and traveled California with his corps of high-salaried experts. And his guardians could only apprehend a swift and wide dispersal of the Forrest millions when Dick attained his majority, took charge of the totality of his fortune, and actually embarked on his agricultural folly.

The day he was twenty-one the purchase of his principality, that extended west from the Sacramento River to the mountain tops, was consummated.

"An incredible price," said Mr. Crockett.

"Incredibly cheap," said Dick. "You ought to see my soil reports. You ought to see my water-reports. And you ought to hear me sing. Listen, guardians, to a song that is a true song. I am the singer and the song."

Whereupon, in the queer quavering falsetto that is the sense of song to the North American Indian, the Eskimo, and the Mongol, Dick sang:

> "Hu'-tim yo'-kim koi-o-di'!
> Wi'-hi yan'-ning koi-o-di'!
> Lo'-whi yan'-ning koi-o-di'!
> Yo-ho' Nai-ni', hal-u'-dom yo nai, yo-ho' nai-nim'!"

"The music is my own," he murmured apologetically, "the way I think it ought to have sounded. You see, no man lives who ever heard it sung. The Nishinam got it from the Maidu, who got it from the Konkau, who made it. But the Nishinam and the Maidu and the Konkau are gone. Their last rancheria is not. You plowed it under, Mr. Crockett, with you bonanza gang-plowing, plow-soling farming. And I got the song from a certain ethnological report, volume three, of the United States Pacific Coast Geographical and Geological Survey. Red Cloud, who was formed out of the sky, first sang this song to the stars and the mountain flowers in the morning of the world. I shall now sing it for you in English."

And again, in Indian falsetto, ringing with triumph, vernal and

bursting, slapping his thighs and stamping his feet to the accent, Dick sang:

> "The acorns come down from heaven!
> I plant the short acorns in the valley!
> I plant the long acorns in the valley!
> I sprout, I, the black-oak acorn, sprout, I sprout!"

Dick Forrest's name began to appear in the newspapers with appalling frequency. He leaped to instant fame by being the first man in California who paid ten thousand dollars for a single bull. His livestock specialist, whom he had filched from the Federal Government, in England outbid the Rothschilds' Shire farm for Hillcrest Chieftain, quickly to be known as Forrest's Folly, paying for that kingly animal no less than five thousand guineas.

"Let them laugh," Dick told his ex-guardians. "I am importing forty Shire mares. I'll write off half his price the first twelvemonth. He will be the sire and grandsire of many sons and grandsons for which the Californians will fall over themselves to buy of me at from three to five thousand dollars a clatter."

Dick Forrest was guilty of many similar follies in those first months of his majority. But the most unthinkable folly of all was, after he had sunk millions into his original folly, that he turned it over to his experts personally to develop along the general broad lines laid down by him, placed checks upon them that they might not go catastrophically wrong, bought a ticket in a passenger brig to Tahiti, and went away to run wild.

Occasionally his guardians heard from him. At one time he was owner and master of a four-masted steel sailing ship that carried the English flag and coals from Newcastle. They knew that much, because they had been called upon for the purchase price, because they read Dick's name in the papers as master when his ship rescued the passengers of the ill-fated *Orion*, and because they collected the insurance when Dick's ship was lost with most of all hands in the great Fiji hurricane. In 1896, he was in the Klondike; in 1897, he was in Kamchatka and scurvy-stricken; and, next, he erupted with the American flag into the Philippines. Once, although they could never learn how nor why, he was owner and master of a crazy tramp steamer, long since rejected by Lloyd's, which sailed under the aegis of Siam.

From time to time business correspondence compelled them to hear from him from various purple ports of the purple seas. Once, they had to bring the entire political pressure of the Pacific Coast to bear upon Washington in order to get him out of a scrape in Russia, of which affair not one line appeared in the daily press, but which affair was secretly provocative of ticklish joy and delight in all the chancellories of Europe.

Incidentally, they knew that he lay wounded in Mafeking; that he pulled through a bout with yellow fever in Guayaquil; and that he stood trial for brutality on the high seas in New York City. Thrice they read in the press dispatches that he was dead: once, in battle, in Mexico; and twice, executed, in Venezuela. After such false flutterings, his guardians refused longer to be thrilled

when he crossed the Yellow Sea in a sampan, was "rumored" to have died of beri-beri, was captured from the Russians by the Japanese at Mukden, and endured military imprisonment in Japan.

The one thrill of which they were still capable, was when, true to promise, thirty years of age, his wild oats sown, he returned to California with a wife to whom, as he announced, he had been married several years, and whom all his three guardians found they knew. Mr. Slocum had dropped eight hundred thousand along with the totality of her father's fortune in the final catastrophe at the Los Cocos mine in Chihuahua when the United States demonetized silver. Mr. Davidson had pulled a million out of the Last Stake along with her father when he pulled eight millions from that sunken, man-resurrected, river bed in Amador County. Mr. Crockett, a youth at the time, had "spooned" the Merced bottom with her father in the late 'fifties, had stood up best man with him at Stockton when he married her mother, and, at Grant's Pass, had played poker with him and with the then Lieutenant U.S. Grant when all the little the western world knew of that young lieutenant was that he was a good Indian fighter but a poor poker player.

And Dick Forrest had married the daughter of Philip Desten! It was not a case of wishing Dick luck. It was a case of garrulous insistence on the fact that he did not know how lucky he was. His guardians forgave him all his wildness. He had made good. At last he had performed a purely rational act. Better; it was a stroke

of genius. Paula Desten! Philip Desten's daughter! The Desten blood! The Destens and the Forrests! It was enough. The three aged comrades of Forrest and Desten of the old Gold Days, of the two who had played and passed on, were even severe with Dick. They warned him of the extreme value of his treasure, of the sacred duty such wedlock imposed on him, of all the traditions and virtues of the Desten and Forrest blood, until Dick laughed and broke in with the disconcerting statement that they were talking like a bunch of fanciers or eugenics cranks – which was precisely what they were talking like, although they did not care to be told so crassly.

At any rate, the simple fact that he had married a Desten made them nod unqualified approbation when he showed them the plans and building estimates of the Big House. Thanks to Paula Desten, for once they were agreed that he was spending wisely and well. As for his farming, it was incontestible that the Harvest Group was unfalteringly producing, and he might be allowed his hobbies. Nevertheless, as Mr. Slocum put it: "Twenty-five thousand dollars for a mere work-horse stallion is a madness. Work-horses are work-horses; now had it been running stock…"

Chapter VII

While Dick Forrest scanned the pamphlet on hog cholera issued by the State of Iowa, through his open windows, across the wide court, began to come sounds of the awakening of the girl who laughed from the wooden frame by his bed and who had left on the floor of his sleeping porch, not so many hours before, the rosy, filmy, lacy, boudoir cap so circumspectly rescued by Oh My.

Dick heard her voice, for she awoke, like a bird, with song. He heard her trilling, in and out through open windows, all down the long wing that was hers. And he heard her singing in the patio garden, where, also, she desisted long enough to quarrel with her Airedale and scold the collie pup unholily attracted by the red-orange, divers-finned, and many-tailed Japanese goldfish in the fountain basin.

He was aware of pleasure that she was awake. It was a pleasure that never staled. Always, up himself for hours, he had a sense that the Big House was not really awake until he heard Paula's morning song across the patio.

But having tasted the pleasure of knowing her to be awake, Dick, as usual, forgot her in his own affairs. She went out of his consciousness as he became absorbed again in the Iowa statistics on hog cholera.

"Good morning, Merry Gentleman," was the next he heard,

always adorable music in his ears; and Paula flowed in upon him, all softness of morning kimono and stayless body, as her arm passed around his neck and she perched, half in his arms, on one accommodating knee of his. And he pressed her, and advertised his awareness of her existence and nearness, although his eyes lingered a full half minute longer on the totals of results of Professor Kenealy's hog inoculations on Simon Jones' farm at Washington, Iowa.

"My!" she protested. "You are too fortunate. You are sated with riches. Here is your Lady Boy, your 'little haughty moon,' and you haven't even said, 'Good morning, Little Lady Boy, was your sleep sweet and gentle?'"

And Dick Forrest forsook the statistical columns of Professor Kenealy's inoculations, pressed his wife closer, kissed her, but with insistent right fore-finger maintained his place in the pages of the pamphlet.

Nevertheless, the very terms of her "reproof prevented him from asking what he should have asked – the prosperity of her night since the boudoir cap had been left upon his sleeping porch. He shut the pamphlet on his right fore-finger, at the place he intended to resume, and added his right arm to his left about her.

"Oh!" she cried. "Oh! Oh! Listen!"

From without came the flute-calls of quail. She quivered against him with the joy she took in the mellow-sweet notes.

"The coveys are breaking up," he said.

"It means spring," Paula cried.

"And the sign that good weather has come."

"And love!"

"And nest-building and egg-laying," Dick laughed. "Never has the world seemed more fecund than this morning. Lady Isleton is farrowed of eleven. The angoras were brought down this morning for the kidding. You should have seen them. And the wild canaries have been discussing matrimony in the patio for hours. I think some free lover is trying to break up their monogamic heaven with modern love-theories. It's a wonder you slept through the discussion. Listen! There they go now. Is that applause? Or is it a riot?"

Arose a thin twittering, like elfin pipings, with sharp pitches and excited shrillnesses, to which Dick and Paula lent delighted ears, till, suddenly, with the abruptness of the trump of doom, all the microphonic chorus of the tiny golden lovers was swept away, obliterated, in a Gargantuan blast of sound – no less wild, no less musical, no less passionate with love, but immense, dominant, compelling by very vastitude of volume.

The eager eyes of the man and woman sought instantly the channel past open French windows and the screen of the sleeping porch to the road through the lilacs, while they waited breathlessly for the great stallion to appear who trumpeted his love-call before him. Again, unseen, he trumpeted, and Dick said:

"I will sing you a song, my haughty moon. It is not my song. It is the Mountain Lad's. It is what he nickers. Listen! He sings

it again. This is what he says: 'Hear me! I am Eros. I stamp upon the hills. I fill the wide valleys. The mares hear me, and startle, in quiet pastures; for they know me. The grass grows rich and richer, the land is filled with fatness, and the sap is in the trees. It is the spring. The spring is mine. I am monarch of my kingdom of the spring. The mares remember my voice. They know me aforetime through their mothers before them. Hear me! I am Eros. I stamp upon the hills, and the wide valleys are my heralds, echoing the sound of my approach.'"

And Paula pressed closer to her husband, and was pressed, as her lips touched his forehead, and as the pair of them, gazing at the empty road among the lilacs, saw it filled with the eruptive vision of Mountain Lad, majestic and mighty, the gnat-creature of a man upon his back absurdly small; his eyes wild and desirous, with the blue sheen that surfaces the eyes of stallions; his mouth, flecked with the froth and fret of high spirit, now brushed to burnished knees of impatience, now tossed skyward to utterance of that vast, compelling call that shook the air.

Almost as an echo, from afar off, came a thin-sweet answering whinney.

"It is the Fotherington Princess," Paula breathed softly.

Again Mountain Lad trumpeted his call, and Dick chanted:

"Hear me! I am Eros! I stamp upon the hills!"

And almost, for a flash of an instant, circled soft and close in his arms, Paula knew resentment of her husband's admiration for the splendid beast. And the next instant resentment vanished,

and, in acknowledgment of due debt, she cried gaily:

"And now, Red Cloud! the Song of the Acorn!" Dick glanced half absently to her from the pamphlet folded on his finger, and then, with equal pitch of gaiety, sang:

> "The acorns come down from heaven!
> I plant the short acorns in the valley!
> I plant the long acorns in the valley!
> I sprout, I, the black-oak acorn, sprout, I sprout!"

She had impressed herself very close against him during his moment of chanting, but, in the first moments that succeeded she felt the restless movement of the hand that held the finger-marked hog-pamphlet and caught the swift though involuntary flash of his eye to the clock on his desk that marked 11:25. Again she tried to hold him, although, with equal involuntariness, her attempt was made in mild terms of resentment.

"You are a strange and wonderful Red Cloud," she said slowly. "Sometimes almost am I convinced that you are utterly Red Cloud, planting your acorns and singing your savage joy of the planting. And, sometimes, almost you are to me the ultramodern man, the last word of the two-legged, male human that finds Trojan adventures in sieges of statistics, and, armed with test tubes and hypodermics, engages in gladiatorial contests with weird microorganisms. Almost, at times, it seems you should wear glasses and be bald-headed; almost, it seems…"

"That I have no right of vigor to possess an armful of girl,"

he completed for her, drawing her still closer. "That I am a silly scientific brute who doesn't merit his 'vain little breath of sweet rose-colored dust.' Well, listen, I have a plan. In a few days…"

But his plan died in birth, for, at their backs, came a discreet cough of warning, and, both heads turning as one they saw Bonbright, the assistant secretary, with a sheaf of notes on yellow sheets in his hand.

"Four telegrams," he murmured apologetically. "Mr. Blake is confident that two of them are very important. One of them concerns that Chile shipment of bulls…"

And Paula, slowly drawing away from her husband and rising to her feet, could feel him slipping from her toward his tables of statistics, bills of lading, and secretaries, foremen, and managers.

"Oh, Paula," Dick called, as she was fading through the doorway; "I've christened the last boy – he's to be known as 'Oh Ho.' How do you like it?"

Her reply began with a hint of forlornness that vanished with her smile, as she warned:

"You *will* play ducks and drakes with the house-boys' names."

"I never do it with pedigreed stock," he assured her with a solemnity belied by the challenging twinkle in his eyes.

"I didn't mean that," was her retort. "I meant that you were exhausting the possibilities of the language. Before long you'll have to be calling them Oh Bel, Oh Hell, and Oh Go to Hell. Your 'Oh' was a mistake. You should have started with 'Red.' Then you could have had Red Bull, Red Horse, Red Dog, Red

Frog, Red Fern – and, and all the rest of the reds."

She mingled her laughter with his, as she vanished, and, the next moment, the telegram before him, he was immersed in the details of the shipment, at two hundred and fifty dollars each, F. O. B., of three hundred registered yearling bulls to the beef ranges of Chile. Even so, vaguely, with vague pleasure, he heard Paula sing her way back across the patio to her long wing of house; though he was unaware that her voice was a trifle, just the merest trifle, subdued.

Chapter VIII

Five minutes after Paula had left him, punctual to the second, the four telegrams disposed of, Dick was getting into a ranch motor car, along with Thayer, the Idaho buyer, and Naismith, the special correspondent for the *Breeders' Gazette*. Wardman, the sheep manager, joined them at the corrals where several thousand young Shropshire rams had been assembled for inspection.

There was little need for conversation. Thayer was distinctly disappointed in this, for he felt that the purchase of ten carloads of such expensive creatures was momentous enough to merit much conversation.

"They speak for themselves," Dick had assured him, and turned aside to give data to Naismith for his impending article on Shropshires in California and the Northwest.

"I wouldn't advise you to bother to select them," Dick told Thayer ten minutes later. "The average is all top. You could spend a week picking your ten carloads and have no higher grade than if you had taken the first to hand."

This cool assumption that the sale was already consummated so perturbed Thayer, that, along with the sure knowledge that he had never seen so high a quality of rams, he was nettled into changing his order to twenty carloads.

As he told Naismith, after they had regained the Big House

and as they chalked their cues to finish the interrupted game:

"It's my first visit to Forrest's. He's a wizard. I've been buying in the East and importing. But those Shropshires won my judgment. You noticed I doubled my order. Those Idaho buyers will be wild for them. I only had buying orders straight for six carloads, and contingent on my judgment for two carloads more; but if every buyer doesn't double his order, straight and contingent, when he sees them rams, and if there isn't a stampede for what's left, I don't know sheep. They're the goods. If they don't jump up the sheep game of Idaho … well, then Forrest's no breeder and I'm no buyer, that's all."

As the warning gong for lunch rang out – a huge bronze gong from Korea that was never struck until it was first indubitably ascertained that Paula was awake – Dick joined the young people at the goldfish fountain in the big patio. Bert Wainwright, variously advised and commanded by his sister, Rita, and by Paula and her sisters, Lute and Ernestine, was striving with a dip-net to catch a particularly gorgeous flower of a fish whose size and color and multiplicity of fins and tails had led Paula to decide to segregate him for the special breeding tank in the fountain of her own secret patio. Amid high excitement, and much squealing and laughter, the deed was accomplished, the big fish deposited in a can and carried away by the waiting Italian gardener.

"And what have you to say for yourself?" Ernestine challenged, as Dick joined them.

"Nothing," he answered sadly. "The ranch is depleted. Three

hundred beautiful young bulls depart to-morrow for South America, and Thayer – you met him last night – is taking twenty carloads of rams. All I can say is that my congratulations are extended to Idaho and Chile."

"Plant more acorns," Paula laughed, her arms about her sisters, the three of them smilingly expectant of an inevitable antic.

"Oh, Dick, sing your acorn song," Lute begged.

He shook his head solemnly.

"I've got a better one. It's purest orthodoxy. It's got Red Cloud and his acorn song skinned to death. Listen! This is the song of the little East-sider, on her first trip to the country under the auspices of her Sunday School. She's quite young. Pay particular attention to her lisp."

And then Dick chanted, lisping:

> "The goldfish thwimmeth in the bowl,
> The robin thiths upon the tree;
> What maketh them thit so eathily?
> Who stuckth the fur upon their breasths?
> God! God! He done it!"

"Cribbed," was Ernestine's judgment, as the laughter died away.

"Sure," Dick agreed. "I got it from the *Rancher and Stockman*, that got it from the *Swine Breeders' Journal*, that got it from the *Western Advocate*, that got it from *Public Opinion*, that got

it, undoubtedly, from the little girl herself, or, rather from her Sunday School teacher. For that matter I am convinced it was first printed in *Our Dumb Animals*."

The bronze gong rang out its second call, and Paula, one arm around Dick, the other around Rita, led the way into the house, while, bringing up the rear, Bert Wainwright showed Lute Ernestine a new tango step.

"One thing, Thayer," Dick said in an aside, after releasing himself from the girls, as they jostled in confusion where they met Thayer and Naismith at the head of the stairway leading down to the dining room. "Before you leave us, cast your eyes over those Merinos. I really have to brag about them, and American sheepmen will have to come to them. Of course, started with imported stock, but I've made a California strain that will make the French breeders sit up. See Wardman and take your pick. Get Naismith to look them over with you. Stick half a dozen of them in your train-load, with my compliments, and let your Idaho sheepmen get a line on them."

They seated at a table, capable of indefinite extension, in a long, low dining room that was a replica of the hacienda dining rooms of the Mexican land-kings of old California. The floor was of large brown tiles, the beamed ceiling and the walls were whitewashed, and the huge, undecorated, cement fireplace was an achievement in massiveness and simplicity. Greenery and blooms nodded from without the deep-embrasured windows, and the room expressed the sense of cleanness, chastity, and

coolness.

On the walls, but not crowded, were a number of canvases – most ambitious of all, in the setting of honor, all in sad grays, a twilight Mexican scene by Xavier Martinez, of a peon, with a crooked-stick plow and two bullocks, turning a melancholy furrow across the foreground of a sad, illimitable, Mexican plain. There were brighter pictures, of early Mexican-Californian life, a pastel of twilight eucalyptus with a sunset-tipped mountain beyond, by Reimers, a moonlight by Peters, and a Griffin stubble-field across which gleamed and smoldered California summer hills of tawny brown and purple-misted, wooded canyons.

"Say," Thayer muttered in an undertone across to Naismith, while Dick and the girls were in the thick of exclamatory and giggling banter, "here's some stuff for that article of yours, if you touch upon the Big House. I've seen the servants' dining room. Forty head sit down to it every meal, including gardeners, chauffeurs, and outside help. It's a boarding house in itself. Some head, some system, take it from me. That Chiney boy, Oh Joy, is a wooz. He's housekeeper, or manager, of the whole shebang, or whatever you want to call his job – and, say, it runs that smooth you can't hear it."

"Forrest's the real wooz," Naismith nodded. "He's the brains that picks brains. He could run an army, a campaign, a government, or even a three-ring circus."

"Which last is some compliment," Thayer concurred heartily.

"Oh, Paula," Dick said across to his wife. "I just got word that Graham arrives to-morrow morning. Better tell Oh Joy to put him in the watch-tower. It's man-size quarters, and it's possible he may carry out his threat and work on his book."

"Graham? – Graham?" Paula queried aloud of her memory. "Do I know him?"

"You met him once two years ago, in Santiago, at the Café Venus. He had dinner with us."

"Oh, one of those naval officers?"

Dick shook his head.

"The civilian. Don't you remember that big blond fellow – you talked music with him for half an hour while Captain Joyce talked our heads off to prove that the United States should clean Mexico up and out with the mailed fist."

"Oh, to be sure," Paula vaguely recollected. "He'd met you somewhere before… South Africa, wasn't it? Or the Philippines?"

"That's the chap. South Africa, it was. Evan Graham. Next time we met was on the *Times* dispatch boat on the Yellow Sea. And we crossed trails a dozen times after that, without meeting, until that night in the Café Venus.

"Heavens – he left Bora-Bora, going east, two days before I dropped anchor bound west on my way to Samoa. I came out of Apia, with letters for him from the American consul, the day before he came in. We missed each other by three days at Levuka – I was sailing the *Wild Duck* then. He pulled out of

Suva as guest on a British cruiser. Sir Everard Im Thurm, British High Commissioner of the South Seas, gave me more letters for Graham. I missed him at Port Resolution and at Vila in the New Hebrides. The cruiser was junketing, you see. I beat her in and out of the Santa Cruz Group. It was the same thing in the Solomons. The cruiser, after shelling the cannibal villages at Langa-Langa, steamed out in the morning. I sailed in that afternoon. I never did deliver those letters in person, and the next time I laid eyes on him was at the Café Venus two years ago."

"But who about him, and what about him?" Paula queried. "And what's the book?"

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.