

## 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 over-strung 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.