

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."