

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.