

THE ROSE DAWN

do. The car waited while they went into the stores and bought things. I got tired after a while, and got out and walked. Can you beat that?"

"Oh yes, that is quite the custom," was Mills's comment, "You see, the car only makes four round trips a day."

"I see," returned Boyd, in rather a crushed voice.

They drove in silence for some moments. The open country succeeded the last scattered houses of the town. The oak-parked hills rolled away to right and left, unfretted by fences. Ground squirrels scurried to their holes; little owls bobbed from the tops of low earth mounds; a road runner flopped rangily into the dust of the road and rocked away in challenge ahead of the horse. Under the oak trees stood the cattle, already fed full. The starred carpet of *alfileria* had been fitted to the hills, and in the folds and up the slopes scarves of bright colour—lupin, poppy, *nieve*, poor man's gold—had been flung. Quail and meadowlark, oriole and vireo, led a chorus of birds. In tiny pond-patches of tule and cattail, mudhens and ducks talked busily in low voices. The yellow sunlight flooded the land like an amber wine.

"You certainly have a wonderful country to look at, and wonderful weather. What's the matter with it?"

"Matter with it?" repeated Mills. "Nothing. What do you mean?"

"Well, look around you. There isn't a house to be seen. If this country was as good as it looks you ought to have a farm house for every two hundred acres."

"Oh, I see. Well, this that you are looking at is all one big ranch—the Corona del Monte. Belongs to Colonel Peyton, where we are going."

"How far does he extend?"

"Up the valley? About five miles."

"What's beyond?"

"Las Flores—belongs to a Spanish family, the Cazaderos. They owned practically the whole of the valley under the old grant. The present ranch is not a quarter of their original holdings."

"Sell out?"