

for as long as the Colonel was afoot it became much smaller than even its actual and modest dimensions. The Colonel was not over six feet, and he was slender; but he had presence. Everything except the Cathedral Oaks and the Sierra del Sur seemed rather undersized when he was around—and, they only just fitted. As a matter of fact the ranch house, when analyzed right down and stripped of its vines and its coco-matting and its big pink seashells and its wonderful haircloth mahogany and its doilies and stuffed birds and steel engravings and traditions and such matters, would have turned out to be merely a rather small one-storied board-and-batten structure with a wide veranda running all the way around it, set comfortably amid the huge live oaks. It took a very clear-headed man to do this analysis. I know of two only; and they made their discovery with considerable surprise.

But this particular morning of one spring of the eighties was an especial occasion. The Colonel did not, as was his usual custom, take a look at his oaks and his green half moon of lawn with its border of plumbago and geraniums and other bright flowers, glance down the perspective of his avenue of palms that led to the distant Camino Real, breathe deeply of the sparkling morning air, and so return to his table. On this one day were the most important matters afoot. It was Allie's birthday, and on that anniversary the Rancho de la Corona del Monte—hereafter, except on ceremonial occasions, let us call it, like the rest of the country, Corona del Monte for short—turned itself inside out and had the biggest barbecue picnic of the year. So the Colonel put on his low-crowned, wide-brimmed Stetson and took his way around the corner of the house.

The Colonel, as has been said, was tall and slender. Beneath his Stetson his clean-shaven face with its hawknose and kindly eyes looked remarkably young and vigorous. Yet on closer inspection you could not have missed the network of fine quizzical lines that seamed his countenance; nor the delightful winter-apple quality in the colour of his lean ruddy cheeks; nor the calm, lofty dignified set of the mouth as in the portraits of Washington, Franklin, and their compeers, which means not so much loftiness of soul as lack of teeth. No, the Colonel was getting on. You