



The Stranger in Big Sur

Lillian Bos Ross

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The Big Sur Trilogy is the story about one of the last pioneer families in America who lived freely and self-sufficiently in a remote area of the central California known as Big Sur. The Stranger, the first of the three novels, begins in 1870 as Zande Allen arrives on horseback at the stage in Monterey to meet Hannah, his mail order bride who came from the east by rail and stage to marry and live with him on his cattle ranch on the remote south coast. At thirty years old, Zande had worked hard to build up a small cattle ranch, but none of the coast women suited him and he needed a wife to help with the chores and bear him children. Hannah, a refined Swedish lady from the Midwest who had never wed, was surprised to discover the man she had come so far to marry was abrupt, hard spoken and ignorant about women, while Zande was immediately suspicious of her every word and thought her too refined, too weak and soft to learn the ways of coast women. Known as a strong man on the coast, he was not about to be bested by any woman, especially by one he bought and owned. After an explosive wedding night, they began a long period of estrangement as both tried to understand each other's strange ways. In addition to being nettled by trying to figure out his new wife, Zande had many misadventures, including his brief tryst with Maria Dumas, a Spanish coast girl who had been chasing him for years; his near-death battle with a nine-foot grizzly bear; and his capture of a gang of cattle rustlers, for which he received an unexpected reward. Still perplexed by his new wife, he took a steamer to San Francisco where he spent his reward money and bought things to surprise her upon his return--things he never believed he would ever buy or be able to afford. Zande and his bride finally make peace and, in the end, he declares, "For the first time in my life I feel to home in world I was borned in".

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