

The Fallen Idol

(An Edwardian romance)

Chapter 1

It was a Sunday morning in Surrey, one of the loveliest of all English counties, and a sunny day early in June.

All nature seemed to browse in stillness. An old shepherd whose only time piece was the sun, looked skyward and judged it to be about half an hour to midday.

Also, a good half hour had passed since the bells of Dinglevale had ceased to peal.

Very characteristic were the bells of Dinglevale and inclined to sound like the denomination they served. The full peel of eight, in the belfry of the old church tower was not, as a rule, rung before the service. But during the ten minutes while the congregation gathered, the lowest three would sound with solemn persistence; 'Come-to-church! Come-to-church! 'Come-to-church!' After which, the theme would change suddenly with five bells bursting out in eager insistence:

'Don't-go-to-chapel! 'Don't-go-to-chapel!' And an occasional return to; 'Come-to-church!' Meanwhile the solitary bell in the humble chapel Was doing its best with the only note it possessed; 'Come-come-come!' All the swinging and swaying, all the commotion and vibration in the ecclesiastical booming, failed to silence the brave little 'Come-come' of the chapel bell.

But when the hour struck all other sounds fell silent and as the strokes tolled slowly, the worshippers hurried up the church path to the porch and disappeared through the red, baize-covered swing doors, through which came the mellow tones of the old organ.

In the chapel, the harmonium, played by Miss Emily Dink, the chemist's pretty daughter - whose engagement to the minister was now looked upon as

almost a certainty - had performed its introductory wheeze and was now bleating through the tine of the opening hymn.

None of these inner sounds, however, reached the hilltops; nor did they penetrate to the ears of the old shepherd, whose only concession to the Sabbath day was a clean smock-frock. He leaned against the gate, twirling a straw between toothless gums; enjoying the present and ruminating on the past.

Neither were they heard by the cyclist appearing on the horizon thirty minutes after the bells had ceased ringing. He rode swiftly over the wide Surrey common and in less than no time was skimming down the broad, white ribbon of road between the golden gorse and heading straight for the long hill to drop gently in to the village of Dinglevale.

He was a powerfully built young man, with a strong face and head erect, a sunburnt face with masses of dark hair rising from an intelligent brow. One hand was on the handlebars and one plunged into the pocket of an old blazer, bearing the coat of arms of some college or club. The old white flannels had by no means the immaculate Sunday appearance of the shepherd's smock, but he carried a look of vigour - masterful and self-assured. He had a swift, easy movement which sent the pedals round without any apparent effort. His brown eyes, bright and keen, took in the whole landscape as he rode and his boyish face and obvious delight in life was so infectious that jaded passers-by smiled in spite of themselves and went on their way feeling that the world was perhaps beautiful after all. As he flashed passed he could have been taken for a tennis player or the captain of the local cricket team. He was obviously on his way to prove some championship or other - not flushed with pride and elation but as a matter of course; merely doing that which he had made up his mind to do.

A certain amount of first impressions would have been right. His foremost rule of life was 'I am the master of my fate; I am the captain of my soul.' He intended to succeed in everything he undertook. His clear eyes were always lifted fearlessly to the top of the ladder. He was not there yet, in fact he stood at the bottom, but nothing and no-one would stand in his way. But he was not intent on sport on this particular clear, Sunday morning. Far from it. He was a hard-working doctor riding back to an unfinished breakfast and to a cup of coffee long since grown cold.

He had lately taken a degree with honours but had neither the money nor the influence to buy a practice of his own so he was acting as a locum for a country doctor who had suffered a nervous breakdown and was having a necessary long and complete holiday.

The practice was a large one and the experience varied and useful, so Richard Cameron M.B. found ample scope for his energy and for the development of his up-to-date ideas. Dinglevale had actually been the home of his childhood so he was spoken of with great affection as Master Dick and then Dr. Dick as they came to know and respect him in his new profession. He was trusted with a wholehearted confidence, in spite of his youth and unprofessional appearance, that they would not have bestowed on a strange, young doctor.

So he was accepted in place of their own staid and elderly medical advisor and had now been there long enough to take a holiday which on this particular Sunday morning he had planned to do. As always he was well ahead with his work and none of his patients were likely to want him before the afternoon. He had come down to breakfast in casual clothes ready to mow his landlady's lawn then lie on his back in the sun and think about life in general and his own brilliant future in particular.

He was halfway through his first cup of coffee when the housekeeper came in with a note marked 'urgent'. 'Oh, no,' groaned the doctor, 'Not today!' and with all the callous selfishness of youth, 'they can wait.' But when he saw it was about someone he knew, the young wife of a Rector five miles away, his professionalism returned. Life saving was his passion after all and this was a pretty young woman with pneumonia and heart failure. 'Why didn't they call me sooner,' he thought, stuffing his stethoscope and various prescriptions into his pockets. The eggs and bacon would have to wait.

By hard riding Dr. Dick turned in at the Rectory gate half an hour sooner than the anxious family had dared to hope. His strong brown hands turned back the lace at the neck of the night-dress so gently that the Rector's wife did not summon the energy to open her eyes. He listened to the fluttering heart and gave simple instructions and some of his own soothing remedies. Pharmacy gave him particular pleasure and in the little room he was pleased to call his

surgery, in view of the heights he would rise to one day, he had concocted one answer for the relief that he now felt justified in administering. Dr. Dick never felt the need to call a nurse. He would do all that was necessary. So here he waited patiently until the breathing was easier and the household instructed and at peace. In any case, he thought, the holiday would have to wait and he would be there while she needed him

The church bells had ceased tinging as the young doctor rode back to his breakfast and the old shepherd was pronouncing to himself and the wild life around him what he thought the time would be.

Dr. Dick took in every detail of the surrounding countryside, pleased with life and once more turning an apparent defeat in a patient's life to something of a victory. He saw the church in the distance and wondered vaguely to himself why so many people felt they ought to coop themselves up in a dingy building singing hymns and listening to something they hardly understood and do it on such a glorious June morning.

Well, he supposed the church tower would always look smug on Sundays - especially in the English countryside and even if people like him preferred to play golf and be men of reason and avoid church - there would really always be discordant notes on the harmonious Sunday landscape.

'Hello,' he thought, 'I wonder what's up.' He had caught sight of an agitated little group in the church porch as he cycled past the churchyard. Springing off his bike he strode up the path..

Chapter 2

When Dick Cameron reached the church porch he found half a dozen people forming a useless crowd around a Little White Lady with drawn face. Her eyes were fixed in a kind of helpless agony. The old verger, in a rusty black cassock, held a glass of water and a stout churchwarden blocked the doorway, keeping out most of the fresh air.

The Little White Lady sat huddled on the wooden seat, supported by an elderly female all in black who fanned her with a prayer book and saying, 'Gawd help us' at intervals.

Dr. Dick shot his long arm between the rusty cassock and the churchwarden's black coat and laid his fingers lightly on the frailest little hand he had ever seen.

He then began to shove people out of the way without the slightest pretence at courtesy and bending over the Little White Lady, proceeded to unfasten the cameo brooch at the neck.

Instantly a black, cotton glove pushed him away and he was confronted by the elderly female in black.

'My name, young man, is Ellen Ransom,' she said, 'and I'll have you to understand you do not lay a finger on my lady.'

'My name is Dr. Cameron, young lady, and yours could be Mrs. Shalal-hash-baz for all I care at the moment,' said Dick, 'and I'll have you to understand that your lady is now in my care and you are under my orders. Now, get this lacy thing unfastened in ten seconds or I'll get out a penknife.'

The elderly maid gave him a furious look but something in the clear brown eyes which met hers with authority and the forceful decision of the broad-shouldered youth quenched her anger for the moment and made her do what he asked.

She busied herself with the many fastenings at the neck and bosom of the dainty gown. As Dr. Dick stood back a moment, his shoulder pushed the green, baize doors slightly ajar and a whiff of the close atmosphere from within reached him. 'Oh, for heaven's sake,' he said, in exasperation, 'you could cut this air with a knife. No wonder she is in trouble. No-one can put up with frowzy theology and a poisonous atmosphere.' The schoolmaster, near the door, came out in haste. 'Dick, your remark was audible throughout the whole church.'

His thin face was full of dismay.

'Best text they've heard in a long time, I expect, Jerry,' said Dick, putting his stethoscope back in his pocket. 'Now you are here, could you manage to find a cushion, that red velvet one in the pulpit will do and everyone, except Mrs. Hash-baz will clear out, please. What we need most is plenty of privacy and fresh air. Stop that organ, I can't hear myself speak. What?'

It's the hymn before the sermon. Well they can't have a hymn until my patient is better. Now, Mr. Churchwarden, go in and say so, or I will. But you could possibly do it more tactfully. Ah, Jerry, good man. That's the very thing. Could you put it in the corner then wait for a minute. I'll need you. Now, madam' his voice and manner changed completely as he bent over the Little White Lady 'we will soon give you some relief.'

The grey eyes looked up at his with an expression of anguish and the breathless lips seemed to implore him not to move her. 'Don't be frightened,' he said gently, 'leave yourself to me and Mrs. Shalal-has-baz.' Then he put his strong young arms round her and laid her gently with her head on the cushion.

It did not take Dick Cameron's quick ear long to find out all there was to know about the worn-out heart which feebly struggled to keep life in the frail body of the Little White Lady. He realised that he had rarely been more closely confronted with death than in that church porch on this sunny, summer morning. The Rector's wife now seemed strong, young and healthy by comparison. A few more timely visits and he knew she would be convalescing. But here his manner became very gentle and his voice low although his movements were quick. There was no time to lose.

Taking his handkerchief he broke a tiny sealed vial and let the contents soak into it for a few minutes. Then he held it so that the Little White Lady gradually inhaled it. Almost at once she began to breathe more easily - a faint colour came into her cheeks and tinted her white lips. The grey eyes closed and she gave a soft sigh of relief.

After a short while she looked up at the keen brown eyes bent upon her face. 'Wonderful.' she whispered, 'Wonderful.' He signed to the maid to bring a glass of water, produced out of another pocket a bottle of red liquid and added a carefully measured dose. Slipping his hand behind the pillow he raised her head and made her drink the heart stimulant. Then he laid his finger on her pulse and this time he smiled.

She opened her mouth to speak but he shook his head. 'No talking yet,' he said. Then turning to the maid, 'where do you live?'

‘Park Lane,’ said Ellen Ransom, shortly, but with a little more respect in her voice. This astonishing young man who had called her heathen names, was ordering her about and was dressed for a cricket match on a Sunday, had, nevertheless, worked a miracle on her dear lady. Her honesty compelled her to admit it so she added, ‘sir’ in a small voice.

‘Park Lane wont help us today, Mrs. Hash-baz. You hardly came here from there this morning.’

It was too much. ‘No heathen names, please. My name is Ellen Ransom. And we came from the Manor House which we have taken for six weeks.’

‘Yes, I heard it was let. But how did you get here this morning?’

‘We walked, of course, sir. My lady doesn’t hold with the car out on Sundays.’

‘Walked?’ Dr. Dick nearly shouted but remembered in time where he was.

‘Walked? All that way? Then, I suppose after all that overtaxing exertion you came into this stuffy ill-ventilated place where all the oxygen was used up centuries ago. No wonder she felt faint. The odour of sanctity I call it and absolutely criminal lack of fresh air must be responsible for no end of diseases. Now let’s get our patient out before the whole congregation comes trouping past.’

He beckoned to his friend. ‘Jeremy,’ he said, ‘go to Captain Desart as fast as you can. Tell him I want his car at the church gate as rapidly as he can manage. If he is out, find his chauffeur and give him the order from me. Nothing matters, tell him, but that he gets here as quickly as possible.’

The car was there, gliding swiftly and silently up to the gate within ten minutes. The doctor, listening anxiously, heard the end of the sermon and the congregation rising for the last hymn.

He bent over the Little White Lady.

‘Now, listen,’ he said, ‘I am going to carry you. It is no good protesting. I know you feel all right again but you are not going to walk one step. Just let yourself go, don’t hold your breathe like that. You are not going to carry me. It is no more effort for me than carrying a kitten. Now don’t be afraid.’

Then the Little White Lady felt Dr. Dick’s strong young arms beneath her and it seemed to her that she was wafted to the waiting car with a dream-like ease.

To get into the car was accomplished with no conscious effort on her part at all. She lay back comfortably with Ellen Ransom seated beside her and off they glided just as the red doors opened wide and the congregation streamed out.

‘That was close.’ laughed Dick Cameron. ‘Drive slowly, Chambers,’ he called. ‘Now, I wonder,’ he mused to himself, ‘whether she knows how near she was to what my old aunt used to call, an eternity of Sundays in the world to come! Let’s hope it will all be better ventilated than it is below.’

Chapter 3.

When Dr. Dick had carried the Little White Lady up the wide oak staircase of the Manor House and deposited her safely on her bed, he left her to Ellen Ransom. ‘I’ll wait one hour,’ he announced from the doorway. ‘I want to be quite satisfied everything is all right after the heart has had time to rest and quiet down a bit. Then I will go if all is well. Call me if you want any help.’

He closed the door softly and walked slowly along the wide passage looking at the old pictures in heavy, gilt frames, mostly portraits of ancestors of the owner of the Manor House.

‘Ugly old brutes.’ thought Dick. At the top of the stairs he caught sight of himself in a full length glass and grinned. ‘Well, well,’ he said, ‘you are grubby. Anything less professional looking never forked out a stethoscope. No wonder Mrs. Shalal-hash-baz shrieked at you.’

In the hall he met an elderly butler, grave and respectful, who glanced at the doctor’s dusty clothes. ‘Can I have a wash and brush up?’ enquired the doctor, serenely. ‘I was on my way home from a long cycle ride when your mistress unexpectedly needed me.’

The butler led the way upstairs, equally serene, to the most perfect bathroom Dick had ever seen. ‘Oh, the joy, the absolute luxury of a glorious steaming bath. Was ever a man so tempted,’ he thought, ruefully. The old dragon would come shrieking at me if she saw me wrapped in a white bath

towed and even the mild grey eyes of the Little White Lady would blink in alarm at so unprofessional an act. Dicky, my boy, you dare not risk it.'

He lifted his face from the basin and scrubbed it vigorously with a towel. 'No, Dr. Richard Cameron, M.B, now of Woodbine Villa, Dinglevale, but eventually of Harley Street west, you certainly could not risk being seen in a bath towel by a patient residing in Park lane.'

His handsome face and aristocratic nose with dark laughing eyes looked back at him. There was an irresistible energy about him. 'No, when you are established in a big town house with crowded waiting rooms and people being summoned daily into your consulting room - then - then, you can have a luxury bathroom just like this one. And every time you use it you can say, I've arrived. And all because you took no risks, with a complete disregard of your own creature comforts, in the house of the Little White Lady.'

His merry eyes laughed back at him loving his improved appearance. 'Now, if I can steal a pin and find a rose in the garden, I ought to make quite an impression. My lady will have recovered from her attack and will be able to soothe and sympathise and admire.'

As he opened the door he wished with all his heart that they would realise how rushed he had been, how he had missed his breakfast and how he longed for it to be time for lunch.

In the hall the butler waited.

'Your lunch is served, sir, in the dining room.'

Dick turned joyfully to a room in which he could see the glint of polished glass and silver and the sheen of snowy damask. He ate and drank with a relish that only the young and healthy can manage. But there was a more subtle element mingling with the natural zest of a good appetite.

This lunch at the Manor House seemed to him to settle an old score of twenty years standing. He had been called a greedy little boy by the owner, sitting at this very table.

'I'm even with that old woman at last. I hope the fine old silver belongs to her and not to the Little White Lady. Anyway I am far greedier now than I was then.'

More than twenty years ago, the lonely little boy living with his great-aunt and uncle at the Rectory had been invited to a children's party by the Lady of the Manor.

She was condescending to children and most of them thought she was insufferable but she had an instant dislike to this calm, seven-year old who had lifted fearless eyes to hers. He had arrived in high spirits and was bent on enjoying himself but from the outset he had met with continual and unaccountable checks. When he won a race, beating an older boy, he found the prize being given to the older boy and himself disqualified. When he joined in a game whole-heartedly, he was taken on one side and told not to be so rough.

When he described, with shining eyes, to a little circle of admiring friends, an exciting adventure he had had with a pony, he heard the cold voice of his hostess saying, little boys should not exaggerate. But the climax had been reached at tea. His little soul was crushed and his self-esteem sorely wounded when he failed to win the approval and popularity and success, which, even then, seemed to him to be essential.

This large and cold-voiced person who was running things, had been against him, eyeing him at his best and brightest, with stony disapproval. But he meant to make up for all this at tea-time. He intended to have a very large tea and enjoy it to the full. He could always rely on his appetite. So when the bell rang and the children dashed in through the French windows, he was the first in to the dining-room. And when he climbed into his chair and saw a great array of good things, all disappointments were forgotten. Anyway, he was certainly going to make a success of this. His brown eyes shone. His busy little tongue was at last silenced. He was calculating the race, through the bread and butter and jelly to the delicious looking cakes. The curate, who arrived late was made to apologise by taking around the table all the good things to the children.

Now this curate happened to be little Dick's special friend and hero. He could ride a bike with one leg thrown over the handlebars. He could also sing brilliantly some loud warlike songs at village concerts. When he heard the curate's pounding voice, it filled him with excitement and gave him the same feeling as when he suddenly saw a crimson and gold sunset or heard a band drawing near from a distance. The curate had made a lot of the Rector's little grand-nephew. It pleased him to be the object of adoring admiration even

though the admiration was only that of a boy of seven. But at the Manor House he took no notice of Dick.

Though the brown eyes had sparkled at his entrance, the curate's whole attention was given to the large Lady of the Manor. He watched her like a dog expecting scraps from his owner. Dick could not understand it. He also wondered why the curate was wearing the beautiful silk waistcoat he only wore for really special occasions and why he laughed loud and long at things that were not the least bit funny. He seemed to fetch and carry in a sort of anxious hurry. At that age, Dick did not understand that the Lady of the Manor was paying the curate's wages so that even her stalest joke became hilariously amusing.

When the cake stage came it brought with it poor little Dick's lowest moment. The curate stood opposite to him, drinking a cup of tea. Dick had had his eye on the last two pieces of cake, one larger than the other. Dick weighed anxiously in his mind, which to take. Of course, he thought, it would be polite to take the nearest slice - the large one. He reached out an eager little hand and took the slice nearest. On his plate it looked larger than ever.

Then a cold, clear voice from behind the large teapot, said slowly, 'What a greedy little boy. He has helped himself to the largest piece!' There was an awful silence. It seemed as long as a sermon. It was a nightmare. Would no-one speak, or help, or say he only took the nearest piece quite naturally?

He lifted imploring eyes to his friend and hero, the curate. Dick's cheeks were red with shame. Then the curate laughed a sort of snigger. 'He's a little pig, isn't he? He ought to stand in a corner to eat it.' Dick's hero had collapsed - flat as a pancake. His idol had fallen and his friend had failed him. And he, Dick Cameron, who had so often been a hero to his little friends, had been publicly shamed before their staring eyes.

In their presence, a fury of indignation rose up in him, overcoming all shyness and shame. His hostess, who had asked him to tea, had called him greedy just because he had enjoyed her cakes. He seized his cake and flung it at the curate, catching the cup and shooting the tea down the silk waistcoat.

Dick leapt from his chair and rushed to the door, wrenching it open and turning toward them all in the doorway, his eyes blazing. 'You've been horrible to me all afternoon!' he shouted at his hostess, who had risen in astonishment. The curate was paralysed into inaction, feebly mopping his waistcoat and the frightened children sat round the table, wide-eyed and open-mouthed. One little girl gave a delighted laugh then caught her breathe, half afraid for Dick and of being his special friend.

The angry little figure paused for breathe and inspiration. Then a favourite text of his great-aunt came to him. He hurled it at the Lady of the Manor with absolute conviction and inaccuracy. 'I shake off my shoes from off my feet,' cried the furious little voice, as he slammed the door shut, 'and I hope you go to Sodom and Gomorrah!' Then he darted across the hall and made a dash out of the Manor and up the village without a pause for breathe. For once the sight of Aunt Louisa was welcome. She was stern but she was just. It was such an overwhelming catastrophe that had happened to him that he longed to tell her the whole thing. Surely she would understand. But Aunt Louisa was busy with her roses and wanted to finish before sunset. She took him by the hand and led him inside. She said she knew he had been naughty and sent home, that was a foregone conclusion. She would think about it in a minute and meanwhile he could go to his room and learn the hymn he had not managed to learn on Sunday 'We are but little children weak '

No, no excuses, not a word. She found the hymn book and put a marker in it, feeling that it was a calm and satisfactory interview. Besides, his large, brown eyes would look up at her and stop her doing what she wanted and that was to tend the roses while there was daylight.

So Dick trudged slowly upstairs. He had to be slow because he had decided to stamp on the hymn book at each step.

He had reached the second verse, alone in his room, when the curate came striding up the drive. In a few minutes the study door opened and great Uncle Andrew called in his most horrible voice, 'Lou-wheezah!'

Whereupon Aunt Louisa dropped her scissors and hurried in.

With the study door shut again, little Dick flew up to his room from his position peeping through the bannisters and dropped to his knees.

'Oh God, please let the judgement day happen before the study door opens again. Oh, god, please let the heavens and earth pass away before they come up to look for me.' He held his breathe to listen.

The study door opened and Aunt Louisa rustled up the stairs, took him by the hand and led him firmly into the study where Uncle Andrew and the fallen idol waited. Here, in Dick's presence, the curate gave a recital of the afternoon's happenings. He did it with zealous gusto. And very bad it sounded. Dick's own version of the story, with all he had endured was too difficult to express. If he could have climbed into his mother's arms and felt her soft hair, and her cheek on his, he could have told her everything. When asked for his version, he could only say, 'They were perfectly beastly and I hate them.' So his fate was sealed.

After a severe caning the curate was able to return to his Lady of the Manor to report that justice had been done. When they had finished with him, Dick escaped by the back door, crept through the dark wood and slipped through the hedge into the quiet churchyard and came, at last, to the white marble of his mother's tomb. Here he flung himself down, sobbing in helpless grief. It was quite easy to be brave in the study because he hated Uncle Andrew and now despised the curate. Now, however, he clung to the marble and sobbed convulsively.

At last he could sob no more and buried his face in the cool moss and began to talk to his dead mother lying below.

'Do you know, Mummy,' he said, in a broken little voice, 'I'm never going to pray again in my whole life, 'cept Jesus tender Shepherd, hear me,' that you taught me.' The little voice hardened and then he continued, this time talking to himself. 'I'm never going to pray again, but when I'm big, I'll make judgement day happen and if I choose, I'll make heaven and earth pass away. I wont get left behind but I'll come out first and on top of everybody and everything. And I'll do it without Uncle Andrew and Aunt Louisa and I wont ever love anyone because no-one loves me. And now I'm going to get up and do the wickedest thing I can think of.'

He climbed up onto his mother's grave and sat there thinking. At last his face brightened. He had thought of the most wicked thing in all the world. 'I shall go to hell for it, sure, but it wont matter. They wont be there and there'll be no texts or hymn books and Mummy can give me happy visits.' He smiled and looked up at the fine, old, stained-glass window of the church.

It was of St. Peter and Dick particularly disliked it. For one thing St. Peter held keys and keys locked people in their bedrooms and another thing the figure was bald and Uncle Andrew was bald.

Now the sudden inspiration which had come to little Dick on this sad evening when the traditions of his small life had gone to pieces, was that the wickedest thing in the whole world to do would be to put a stone clean through St. Peter's gold halo plate thing behind his head. And this would give him immense satisfaction. He considered this for a long time as twilight fell. He could just see the outline as the gold and red of the sunset shone through the church and the massive window. Now, stiff with pain from Uncle Andrew's whacking, he stood up suddenly with decision.

'I'm like David and old Peter is Goliath, but I won't bother with five stones. One will be enough.' His active little mind ran through the Old Testament story and he almost felt himself a hero.

Bending back his arm he took careful aim and sent the stone clean through the window, clattering onto the stone pavement of the chancel steps. Then Dick ran home, crept in by the back way and put himself, supperless, to bed.

When Aunt Louisa at last went up to look for him she found him fast asleep, one arm flung over his curly head. His flushed face had a look of triumphant peace. He had gone to bed in his clothes. 'Poor little boy,' she said, softly. She soon discovered why he had not bothered to undress. His shirt was stuck to him in dark red lines. She shivered as she drew the bedclothes over him again.

'Andrew is a hard man,' she thought, in the secret of her own sad heart. But what she said was, 'Poor child, I hope he has learnt his lesson.' Dick might have said, 'Grown-ups don't often say what they really think.'

Chapter 4

Strangely enough, the breaking of St. Peter's halo was not discovered for three or four days. The cleaning lady found the unaccustomed light pouring through and eventually saw the cause. The news spread like wildfire and all kinds of people were discussed as possible culprits but no-one thought of Dick.

And as Dick, during the long morning service, lifted his eyes to the beautiful hole above the bald head, he felt no pricks of conscience and no remorse. Just a great, secret sense of power. He had done this entirely by himself and it was the first of the judgements he intended to bring about, if and when he chose. His little heart was growing hard. And meanwhile, he no longer feared his great-uncle or the unknown terrors with which his great-aunt had made him quail. He looked up at the golden sunlight streaming through the hole with a calmness of mind and a quiet happiness. Aunt Louisa thought that many lessons must at last be bearing fruit! As the fallen idol proclaimed loudly, 'Try me, O God, and prove me and examine my heart,' there was a clear little voice with a full response, 'See if there be any wicked way in me and lead me in the way everlasting.' Aunt Louisa looked down at his seraphic smile and felt there was nothing sinful to hide. As a matter of fact, Dick was saying to himself, 'Let them do what they want, I am not afraid.'

And every shred of belief in their gospel of terror was fleeing from him. That day had proved a turning point for Dick. Burdensome oppressions and petty tyrannies no longer troubled him. Every day seemed crowned with small successes. As he grew, ever since the day of the smashed halo, that evening when a small boy had made up his mind that judgements would happen as, and when, he commanded, few things had been able to withstand Dick's imperious will.

His onward progress from school to university and university to medical school was unhindered by failure. He had long ago determined on a consulting room in Harley Street and after taking his degree and working with several big men in surgical and clinical work, the obvious next step to Dr. Dick was to obtain a practice in town. This was part of the climb to the top of the tree.

Soon after the much needed holiday work had started in Dinglevale, he heard of just the place in Kensington that he wanted. The practice was an excellent one; the neighbourhood highly desirable and the senior partner a lethargic man

who took on cases not too complicated where the patients were charming. Dick knew the man. A little tact, a few casual suggestions, a little flattery if necessary and an undervaluing of his own accomplishments and the thing would be done. Dr. Dick would step into the senior partner's shoes. With his superabundant energy and the other man's lethargy, before he realised what was happening, the junior partner would be the senior.

A step down was unknown to Dick. The only insuperable obstacle in the way of this excellent plan was the cost. The Kensington practice could only be obtained for a sum far beyond Dick's means. He just could not afford it. This seemed to him, however, a mere detail. Dick Cameron made enemies and friends on his march upward and in Dinglevale it was no different. And some of his enemies had Dick's judgement pronounced on them at his earliest convenience. One of them being the 'Fallen Idol Curate', as Dick called him, now the Rector. Dick's tongue was formidable and the fallen idol did not visit again.

However, most of the memories awakened on his return to Dinglevale were happy for Dr. Dick Cameron.

But now as he sat in the dining room at the Manor House he remembered his oath of long ago and still felt he would keep his word, come what may. So he cut himself another piece of cake and walked round the table laughing. 'What a greedy little boy,' he said out loud. 'I can hear her now, how I hate that woman.'

He felt grateful to the Little White Lady upstairs, so small so frail, her hold on life so precarious and uncertain.

Yet it was she who had enabled him to pay off this old score on one of the actors from the past.

As he pinned a golden rose into his old blazer he began to think of the Little White Lady as a kind of mascot.

Was this chance meeting with her going to affect in some unexpected way his whole career? Park Lane she lived in, in London. A good address.

He drew an easy chair near to the table, within reach of the fruit and decanters, lay back in its comfortable depth and took out his cigarette case but returned it unopened to his pocket.

He would have enjoyed smoking in his enemy's beautiful dining room but as the whole house was now rented by the Little White Lady and he would have

to listen to that fluttering heart again, he suspected she would prefer it if he did not smell of smoke.

At that moment Mrs. Maher-shalal-hash-baz came in, still very forbidding but now extremely courteous.

‘My lady is pleased to see you again, doctor.’

Dr. Dick turned to her all attention. He looked into the grim face and smiled. He had a very winning way when he pleased. The grim face relaxed. ‘Was there something you wished to ask before we go up?’ said Dick. ‘You and I must work together, you know. You can speak freely, Mrs. Ransome.’

‘Well,’ she said, in a confidential whisper, ‘Whatever did you give her? All those times she’s spent such long hours in pain and there she was, in two minutes, looking up and smiling. And to think I tried to stop you.’

Dr. Dick regarded her with appreciation.

‘Well, how could you know I was a doctor, looking as I did on a bicycle like that? You were perfectly right to hesitate.’

Mrs. Ransome expanded even further.

‘And you riding with all them things in your pocket ready to hand and many times old Dr. Baines all dress up proper has come in saying he has even forgotten his telescope just when her poor heart was at its worst.’

Dr. Dick looked properly grave.

‘That is criminal carelessness. No wonder it made you anxious.

Everything your lady requires should be at hand the very moment it is needed, especially, especially a stethoscope.’

‘Which brings me to what I wanted to say,’ said Ellen Ransome. ‘You look tired,’ said Dick, ‘please sit down.’

He drew out a chair for her.

‘Not on mahogany, sir, thank you, sir, I know my place. And begging your pardon, I am never tired.’

Dr. Dick looked up at the proud old face.

‘You are a Spartan, Mrs. Ransome,’ he said, ‘but I would take it as a great compliment if you would sometimes be tired when you are with me.

However, we are keeping your lady waiting. What is it you would like to say?’

Ellen Ransome looked for a moment, steadily over his head, apparently considering the Lady of the Manor’s sober ancestors. At length she spoke slowly.

‘Well, doctor, sir, when an attack is over my poor lady lives in terror of another one, especially at nights ‘till the time goes by and she forgets. I wondered if you could leave a dose or two of that medicine for her . . . ‘
‘No,’ said Dr. Dick, quickly, ‘I couldn’t do that. It was a very powerful drug and only a doctor could judge whether it was necessary or not. It might do more harm than good. I might as well leave you a telescope.’

Mrs. Ransome consulted the portraits again.

‘In that case,’ she said at last, ‘in that case, doctor could I be so bold to ask, could you possibly think of staying , I mean sleeping here for a night or two, just in case. Or just until my lady gets back her nerve. Not that we would disturb you but just to feel you and the medicine are handy, so to speak.’

Dr. Dick’s mind jumped at once to the luxurious bathroom. He thought of the huge bath, the abundance of shining taps and the hot water. Farewell to his landlady’s tin bath and all her limitations. Abundance would be his night and morning. He felt he had earned it. The joy of it all shouted riotously in his inner man but outwardly he grew even more professional.

‘That might be possible, Mrs. Ransome, if your lady particularly desires it. There is a special case I am interested in five miles away but after that, when Dr. Thompson returns, I am more or less free before returning to town.’

‘Then you wont be leaving the village yet awhile, and which town, sir, would you be meaning?’

Mrs. Ransome stood her ground. She had not quite finished yet. ‘My good woman,’ laughed Dr. Dick, ‘there is only one town in this little island worth mentioning, why London, of course.’

‘Are you a London doctor, sir?’ she said, with awe.

‘Why certainly, Mrs. Ransome, I am a London doctor. I’m only down here on holiday.’

‘Now the Lord be praised.’ exclaimed Ellen Ransome, devoutly. My poor lady said, ‘If only that young man was a London doctor, Ellen, just when we are losing Dr. Baines, I don’t know what I wouldn’t give to have him near me in Park Lane,’ well, as I said, the Lord be praised.’

‘The Lord has nothing to do with it, my friend,’ smiled Dick. ‘I am going to buy an excellent practice in Kensington and therefore we may consider I shall be within easy call of Park Lane.’

He lay back, looking up at the gaunt elderly woman, infinite amusement in his brown eyes. He wondered whether she was taking him seriously, whether she really thought young doctors earning their bread and butter doing locum work, could afford a London practice. Suddenly the sparkle in his eyes changed. The fun died out and a dull red crept slowly up beneath his tan.

Whatever was he saying and whatever was he doing here?
Why had he called the Little white Lady his mascot? He felt embarrassed. Was ambition taking over his subconscious mind and causing his actions in all these circumstances?

How was it that she had collapsed in the church porch just as he had been passing with a pocketful of remedies?
Why did they keep their silly churches so stuffy?

He stood up suddenly and squared his shoulders. He would take command of all of this mess, anyway, whatever the outcome.
'Come on then, Mrs. Ransome, show me the way.'
As he followed her, he thought she looked like a soldier and behaved like a jailer but he didn't say so and didn't allow his face to change expression. He just laughed to himself, as always.
At the door Mrs. Ransome turned. She was stiff and forbidding.
'Please remember, doctor, my lady may have white hair, but she is not deaf, a thing Dr. Bailees never could remember.'

Dr. Dick smiled, with a youthful look of friendliness and lack of resentment. Then, opening the door of her mistress's bedroom, she announced,
'The doctor, Mrs. Herriot, ma-am.'

Chapter 5.

It was a large, low room with a bow window overlooking the garden and a shady lawn.

The windows were open and a hum of bees stole in from the magnolia blossoms just outside. The room was full of sunbeams yet quiet and cool and a great sense of peace prevailed. Dr. Dick stepped quietly across the old-fashioned carpet. There was an immense four-poster bed, its canopy almost touching the ceiling and with Victorian chintz curtains it was exactly the kind of bed you would have expected for the large Lady of the Manor. She would certainly have filled it, he thought.

But the Little White lady seemed lost in the vast expanse of billowy pillows and spotless white sheets. She looked like an exquisite water-colour but with too large a frame.

The frail whiteness of her cheek was tinted pink with a flush of anxiety. Ellen had been gone so long and it was a very unusual experience to be waiting for a visit from this sun-burnt young man with handsome eyes. He looked completely unlike any medical man she had ever seen and had called her maid by an almost unknown scriptural name and used unrepeatable language to the church officials.

On the other hand his firm fingers on her pulse had brought an instant sense of confidence and he had understood immediately the cause of her pain and anguish without asking a single question.

And what blessed relief with the medicine he gave her. So that although she shrank from this great boy trampling into her bedroom she couldn't let the possibility of his skill not being used if there was further pain. Her heart fluttered like a frightened bird snared by a schoolboy as Ellen Ransome announced 'The doctor, ma-am.'

Whatever should she say to her new medical man now the moment had arrived? There was no need to worry. Dr. Dick saw the anxious flush and settled all questions by announcing, 'Now, don't speak, I cannot allow a word until your heart is settled. And not then unless there is something you particularly wish to say.' What a relief. Mrs. Herriot had always found it difficult to talk to boys. She didn't understand slang and their conversation unnerved and alarmed her. But as she saw his blue blazer and the coat of arms on the pocket, it reminded her of a day watching, under the trees, a cricket match at a public school, so she closed her eyes and lay quite still at his dominating command.

Dick moved a chair to the side of the bed and laid his fingers on her wrist. His touch was firm and reassuring and when she could not see his handsome sun-burnt face and alarmingly bright eyes, her confidence returned.

The doctor studied closely the frail face on the pillows. Its delicate loveliness touched and surprised him. In the church porch he had thought her quite old, like a crumpled lily, but now she looked fair and fragrant, far younger, perhaps not much more than fifty. Her shell-like complexion and perfectly formed features gave him the impression of a cameo.

Although her face was scarcely lined and surrounded as it was with thick, abundant, silvery hair, he felt it told a tale of suffering. There was an upright line of pain between the eyebrows but while the droop of the sweet lips spoke of sadness there was no sign of hardness or bitterness. Disappointment had probably been borne in uncomplaining silence and there was this pre-eminent sense of peace about her.

He surprised himself in feeling that he knew all this almost instinctively. How else? He released her hand and waited. The Little White lady opened her eyes and looked full into the watching eyes of the young doctor. Then she smiled a slow, silent, comprehending smile which increased in understanding as the moments passed. It drew them both infinitely nearer than hours of conversation could have done. At length he said, 'Now, is there anything important you would like to say?'

'What a perfectly lovely rose,' she said. Dick laughed.

'I hoped you would notice it. I pinched it from outside the dining room to balance my ancient clothes that I hope you would not notice.'

'Why do you wear such clothes on a Sunday?'

'Well because my great Aunt Louisa told me it was a day of rest so

'I started the day like this meaning to mow my landlady's lawn and then have a day of rest.'

'I see,' said Mrs. Herriot, 'instead of which'

'Instead of which, I was called out to see an urgent case and had a glorious bike ride across the common. I timed my return to cycle down the hill when all you good people were safely reading the second lesson. As I passed the church I saw, well, I saw that I was wanted.'

The Little White Lady considered this.

Then she said, 'Well, thank God you did pass. But it still seems wonderful that you were carrying all that was necessary. It gave me such a feeling of confidence in you that in any emergency you would be there with everything required to meet it.'

'There's nothing really wonderful about it,' said Dick. 'A doctor should always be ready for emergencies.'

'Yes, I know, but they don't always. In fact, Dr. Baines, although he is soon retiring, '

'I know,' said Dick, holding up his hand in an excellent imitation of Mrs. Ransome, 'I know. But I shall always come to visit you with telescope and my stethoscope and even binoculars, if necessary.'

Mrs. Herriot laughed. 'By the way, you have a remarkable knowledge of scripture to know that Old Testament name Maher-shalal-hash-baz, poor Ellen.'

'Well, she rushed upon me and clutched at me and told me her proper name with such fury. Anyway, my Bible knowledge depends entirely on my capacity for doing wrong when I was young. My aunt made me learn passages in the Bible and names that started with the same letter as the naughty word I had used. I called my Sunday School teacher an Egyptian mummy so I had to learn all the names beginning with M. Well, she was one.'

'Poor little boy. Was that your introduction to the Bible? However was a little child to grow up loving God's word under such conditions?'

Dick remained discreetly silent. He did not know any answer to that.

As Mrs. Herriot continued talking, Dick's eyes were on the leaping pulse in the transparent wrist on the covers. No need to finger it to count the beats. He saw she felt very strongly about the subject.

'The trouble is,' he said, remembering his childhood, 'once people, even many so-called Christians, discover bad in a person, they never expect to find any good.'

Then seeing the pain on the gentle face of the Little White Lady, he concluded lightly, 'even my uncle who disapproved of me, disapproved of places like the chapel.'

'Oh,' cried Mrs. Herriot, sharply, 'never say that. All honest people are trying to do good and we mustn't undervalue them. Nothing fills me with greater indignation than religious intolerance.'

Dr. Dick caught a waving hand in his, as a boy might catch a white butterfly and laid it gently back on the bed.

‘Let’s talk about important things now,’ he said, realising he must return to professional matters and soon end his visit.

‘The most important thing is what you need now, and it is that medical matters must be within your reach as soon as you need them. You have satisfactorily recovered so far, Mrs. Herriot, from this morning’s attack but I should feel uneasy if I were beyond call should you need me during the night. Would you think it presumption on my part if I suggest sleeping in the house tonight so that Mrs. Ransome could call me immediately . . . If the need arose?’

The Little White Lady’s eyes filled with tears of relief. ‘My dear young doctor,’ she said, ‘far from being presumptuous, I was trying to tell myself I dare not ask it of you. The relief to me would be beyond words. But isn’t it expecting too much with all the medical work of this village to see to?’

‘Far from it,’ said Dick. ‘Old Thompson comes back tomorrow and then I just stay on to see a few cases I am interested in. Now, I’ll be off to finish my rounds and leave word where I can be found and then I’ll be in to have a look at you last thing, unless of course, sleep comes to you early. I’ll give your maid a few instructions.’

He rose and stood for a moment looking down on the Little White Lady. She put her hand into his.

‘You are very good to me, my young doctor,’ she said, ‘very good. And I don’t even know your name.’

‘Richard Cameron.’ he answered.

Chapter 6

Mrs. Herriot was lying very still, her eyes on the treetops when Ellen Ransome came in carrying a large, silver vase filled with golden roses.

‘Ellen, wherever did those lovely roses come from?’ she asked.

‘The doctor, ma’am,’ replied Ellen, although she had been vowed to silence!

‘Went through the dining-room windows, clipping away, ‘e did and giving instructions. Told me never to leave your room without flowers ‘e did.

Well, you are the first doctor I know to prescribe flowers, I says, begging

your pardon. And he will be back tonight and as many more nights as we like, he says. I must say, Ma'am, it lifts a burden off me.'

'Ellen,' said Mrs. Herriot slowly, 'did you tell Dr. Cameron we were hoping he would sleep in the house tonight?' 'Well, ma'am, I didn't say you said, but I did suggest it and he took to the idea at once. There's nothing that young man wouldn't do to get a patient better ma'am, but what is a Spartan.' 'A Spartan, Ellen, is a very brave person,' replied the gentle voice from the bed, 'one who can bear to suffer anything in the cause of duty.'

Ellen Ransome drew herself up to her full height, squared her shoulders and marched proudly out of the room. Mrs. Herriot lay very still, her eyes on the golden rose. 'Where was his mother all the time?' she murmured. And presently the Little White Lady fell asleep.

The household was quiet. Twenty-four hours of quiet and rest were ordered by the young doctor, every now and then. His imperious ways caused no resistance in Mrs. Ransome, especially since she now knew herself to be a Spartan! Nearly a month had passed since Dick had taken charge. The Little White Lady expressed a delight in having tea in the garden and Dick was allowed to join her. Their conversation and merry laughter did Mrs. Herriot untold good. Dick lay full length on the velvet grass on one elbow and Mrs. Herriot reclined on a wicker chair with the tea tray set on a low rustic table.

Dick had been round on this particular sunny afternoon to cut himself a large piece of cake remarking in a shocked voice, 'What a greedy little boy!' Mrs. Herriot gave a grave look of astonishment so then Dick had told her the whole story.

The Little White Lady laughed till she wept, then wept softly without laughter at the crashing of the stone through the halo of St. Peter and a sadness fell on her quiet face. Dick had long since stopped all drugs insisting that fresh air and complete rest were the only essentials. In fact Mrs. Herriot now felt better than she had done for years.

The charming old garden and the perfect summer weather gave her all the help she needed and every morning, with a laughing gaiety, Dick had picked her up in his strong arms and carried her to the waiting couch beneath the beech tree. Ellen would place the pretty cushions, a book and knitting and the

silver vase filled with freshly cut flowers. Here she would spend most of the day and lately began also to take a gentle walk and when evening came she would be carried upstairs in the same strong arms and deposited on the couch in her bedroom

Dr. Dick would linger for a moment to make sure she was comfortable and likely to have a good night.

It sometimes seemed strange to Mrs. Herriot how dependent she had become on him -- this young doctor about whom, after all, she knew practically nothing.

From the first there had been very little of the professional about it all. It had become, almost at once, an intimate friendship; careful and attentive and deferential on his part, grateful, affectionate and dependent on hers. Dick talking animatedly about love and the lack of it, Mrs. Herriot listening carefully.

'I loved my mother, passionately,' he said, 'that was my first love. But I was only a little boy. We used to lie on the grass making daisy chains and laughing a lot, I remember, until Aunt Louisa would call out that we would both catch colds and to come in and be sensible. My mother seemed frail and as I grew a little older, she seemed to fade away for want of the strong love of my father, serving in India. He never came home, only to send me to university later, and I believe she pined for his strength. He was a vivid, vital person. However, I never heard any complaints from my mother.'

The mother love in Mrs. Herriot was beginning to awaken and to pour out its pent up fragrance over Dr. Dick.

He was unconscious of it but felt the helpful atmosphere surrounding him as he talked to the Little White Lady. He was breathing it in as part of the delight of summer.

'And how did it come about that you left Dinglevale so soon after the halo broke?' inquired Mrs. Herriot, presently.

'My father's regiment returned from India in the autumn of that year. He was so broken by my mother's unexpected death that he couldn't bring himself to come down but sent for me and put me through school and so on. I don't think he could forgive my uncle and aunt for not letting him know that she was fading. She herself had not known whether to go with her husband or stay with her babe and she chose to stay. Nurse had told me mummy was asleep

under the grass and I remembered she so loved to lie on top of it. I believed Nurse and I believe her still . . .’

Dick stopped abruptly and threw a crumb to a thrush. At length he laughed and threw crumbs at all the sparrows, hopping fearlessly near. ‘Cheeky little beggars,’ he said. ‘How on earth do you manage to get them so near and make them so tame?’

The Little White Lady wiped away her tears and steadied her voice. ‘By keeping absolutely still and always putting the seeds and bread in exactly the same place. Never making a sudden move. If they had clean water somewhere yesterday, it must be a bath of refreshing water on the lawn today, too.’

Mrs. Herriot paused, looking down wistfully on the broad shoulders and dark head on the lawn beside her couch.

Then she added slowly, ‘Also, I think thoughts of love and sympathy continually towards them. I try to understand their point of view and because not one of them is forgotten by God, therefore, not one of them can be forgotten by me. They need not be afraid. Then they come to me with trust and confidence because they have learned to believe in my love and care.’

There was a long silence.

‘Lucky little beggars.’ said Dr. Dick, at last.

After awhile Mrs. Herriot ventured, ‘And did you find love and friendship in your father, too?’

‘Friendship, yes, and everyone thought of me as very like him, but I never knew any tenderness or affection. We understood each other and had some good times together but it seemed that the loving side of him had turned to stone.’

‘It’s a great loss to live a loveless life,’ remarked Mrs. Herriot.

‘I don’t agree with that,’ said Dr. Dick and proceeded to lay down the law with the cock sureness of youth.

‘All love is selfish,’ he said, and continued forcefully with his reasons why.

‘People are merely in love with being loved that’s why there are so many second marriages and divorces.’

Meanwhile Mrs. Heriot buried her face in the glorious roses cut by the young man and placed by her side so lovingly - - this same young man who did not believe in love or selflessness. She was amused and said, 'Yes, I suppose if a man and woman are left with no love between them they better part and go different ways.'

'Ah ha!' cried Dick, 'Now we arrive at the great marriage problem. I suppose you are really like everyone else and favour easy divorce?' Mrs. Herriot flushed. 'No,' she said, 'There the divine comes in. 'Those whom God has joined together let no man put asunder.'

'Well, that is for marriages made in heaven,' said Dick, 'but have you ever known people in love who were not selfish, especially husbands?' Mrs. Herriot considered this in silence, then said slowly and quietly, 'No, I have never known husbands to be unselfish.' Then after awhile, while Dick amused himself with the sparrows, she said, 'Let's talk about friends. Until a moment ago I was under the impression that I enjoyed a delightful friendship with a young doctor. But, I suppose, if I were put on the spot,' she continued slowly, 'I undoubtedly value his expertise, although my belief in him, or is it my vanity? Makes me wonder if he is only interested in the matter concerning the fee I am to have the pleasure of paying him.'

There was a horrified silence, then Dick sat up, scattering birds to the right and left.

'Oh, Mrs. Herriot, Oh, no. Please, you can't mean that. You must know we were talking generally. Please, Mrs. Herriot, say you didn't mean it.'

He knelt on one knee, searching her face.

'You didn't mean it?' he said again. He laid his hand over her fluttering white fingers. 'You didn't mean that.' he said. 'I shall take the next train back to town. There is nothing I value so much as your friendship. You must know that.'

They both saw at the same moment, the French windows of the drawing room open and Ellen coming out, being trailed slowly by the fallen idol. They both began making their ponderous way across the lawn.

'Oh, no.' exclaimed Dr. Dick, 'It's that curate rector fellow. I shall hide under the couch. Don't give me away. I won't make a sound. He's short-

sighted anyway. What the dickens brings him here? Now quick, say you did not mean what you said, before he gets here.'

The Little White Lady said nothing and dislodged the hand on her lace cuff with a playful pat, turning to face, with some apprehension and no little surprise, the approach of the Rector of the parish.

Chapter 7.

The fallen idol walked gingerly over the smooth lawn acknowledging Mrs. Ransome's announcement of his presence with an ingratiating smile. 'I fear this is a somewhat unwarranted intrusion, Mrs. Herriot.'

The Little White Lady's expressive silence gave her consent. She waved him to a wicker chair a little distance from her couch. He drew it slightly forward. 'Your maid very properly requested me to enter,' he said, nervously, placing his knees well together and laying his hat and gloves on them, 'although I have called on a number of occasions and been told you were not at home.'

Mrs. Herriot's couch seemed to vibrate with the upheaval of suppressed laughter.

'However, I now have the pleasure of finding you at home.' The Rector lifted his gloves and hat arranging them in a fresh position.

'I'm very sorry,' she said, with gentle courtesy, 'that you should have made so many fruitless attempts to see me. You should have been told at once that I am not allowed visitors.'

'Something of the kind was mentioned.' replied the Rector, 'but a pastoral visit cannot, of course, be considered an ordinary call.'

'I see,' said Mrs. Herriot.

'My object is twofold, my dear lady,' continued the fallen idol. 'I desired to express my sincere regret that you should have been taken so unwell during your first attendance at my church. And also, I hoped to interest you in the work of the parish of which you are a much valued parishioner -- although perhaps temporary.'

The Rector spoke in his best sermon voice and a heavy sigh came up from beneath the couch. The Little White Lady glanced apprehensively at her visitor and then let her hand drop but withdrew it when gentle fingers were laid mockingly on her pulse.

'I do deeply regret your serious indisposition, especially when Dr. Thompson is absent. I fear this leaves you in the not so capable hands of our locum doctor.'

Mrs. Herriot bridled instantly.

'I have found Dr. Cameron exceedingly efficient and attentive. In fact he seems to understand my case with great accuracy. And, as a matter of fact, has relieved a good deal of my usual suffering.' The fallen idol folded his hands and smiled benignly.

'Ah, is that so?' he said, 'I am so glad. This is my young friend of former years, you know. Unfortunately his personal character is far from all we could desire. And, of course, in a doctor, personal character is everything. I should regret to have to enlighten you.'

Mrs. Herriot's complete silence and the indignant light in her eyes made the fallen idol realise he had made a serious mistake. Then her eyes softened suddenly as her hand unconsciously slipped down again and was given a gentle and silent kiss.

At any other time it may have been thought to be presumption but since they were in this adventure together it brought a smile to her lips.

The fallen idol thought he was back in favour and proceeded with a long dissertation on the workings of Dinglevale parish.

A delicate pink touched each cheek and there was a sense of excitement in the Little White Lady. The kissing of her hand by the young man who lay full length on the grass was a touch of spontaneous affection as sweet as it was

unexpected. It also expressed his confidence of her trust in him and this slight incidence encouraged her. She wanted a gentle hold over this self-reliant, frankly agnostic character and he was now in close contact with the earnest faith and belief in eternal truths which were hers.

So she looked with unseeing gaze at the black, unattractive figure of the Rector and scarcely heard a word.

‘Therefore, my dear lady,’ he concluded, ‘I venture to enlist your kind sympathy, in the hope you may feel inclined to help forward the work of the parish. My predecessor was a man who took little or no interest in the place or the people.’

Mrs. Herriot started and tried to concentrate her mind on her visitor. She felt a sense of intense listening behind her couch but the fallen idol noticed nothing and droned on.

‘I found all parish matters grossly neglected and no funds in hand for present needs but a considerable debt - a complete lack of business knowledge . . .’ With an imperious gesture, Mrs. Herriot raised her hand. ‘Please leave this topic,’ she said, ‘I have no wish to hear these accusations.’

‘Accusations is a strong word, Mrs. Herriot. I am merely explaining to you, in absolute confidence the reason for my sad lack of funds . . . Funds which were not used for the good of the parish and its people,’

Dick sat up with startling suddenness. ‘Now, it is my turn,’ he said, ‘to have a share in this conversation.’

He then leapt to his feet and strode around the couch.

‘I would hesitate to call a man of the cloth a liar, sir, so I will say that my patient has had as long a pastoral visit as I can allow. You will kindly accompany me to the gate and as we go you will tell me exactly what my uncle’s debts were. Uncle Andrew was a hard man, as I have reason to know, but this is the first time I have heard of any dishonest dealings.

Mrs. Herriot will excuse any formal leave taking. Be good enough to come this way.’

Mrs. Herriot, with fluttering heart, felt a sharp stab at her breast. She watched them walk across the lawn wondering what on earth they would do or say to each other.

Dick was well under control but with indignant fury in every line, and the shamed black figure was shambling beside him. Mrs. Herriot watched, trembling, but in a few minutes Dick strode back alone and flung himself down, whistling happily.

'I am so sorry,' he said, 'I hope it hasn't upset you but he knows as well as I do that Uncle Andrew spent more on this parish than he ever received. He had a considerable income of his own and for years he paid the curate out of it. The toad!' He laughed but there was more of anger in it than mirth. He failed to notice the grey shadow creeping over the face of the Little White Lady. 'So much for friendship,' said Dick, 'so much for loyalty.'

'Sh, sh,' said Mrs. Herriot in a whisper, 'hush, dear boy. You have had your say now I will have mine. Dismiss from your mind this unworthy person who interrupted us. Unaided human nature is, at its best, a poor frail thing. Thinking about self as of any importance raises its poisonous fangs . . . I am being as brief as I can, just for now. There are plenty of unselfish, noble people in this world in whom,' she paused for breathe, 'in whom the self-love has been driven out by divine love. It has been called the 'expulsive power of a new affection.' Nothing can drive the self life out of us except the inflow of the Christ-life, the very nature of Him of whom His bitterest enemies said, 'He save others; Himself He cannot save.' It was said as a taunt to a dying Christ but it defined His whole life. It was the mainspring of His great atonement, the deepest secret of our redemption, a love so regardless of self and suffering for the sake of the salvation of others. When we rise to a love like that we have something like the divine love,. Now, take me inside, my dear young doctor I fear you and your fallen idol have tired me.'

That night, for the first time, Ellen Ransome had to call the doctor. There were desperate moments for the two who watched, helped and waited. As he bent over her there flashed into Dick's mind her last words to him under the beech tree that afternoon. 'He saved others; Himself He cannot save.' What connection had those words with the sufferings of the Little White Lady? He did not realise then how much that frail heart was ready and willing to bear if one soul could be brought out from the darkness of doubt and unbelief, into the clear shining of her own perfect faith

But at dawn she slept, at last, and he left her to Ellen Ransome.

Chapter 8.

The day following found Mrs. Herriot unable to make any further effort than sitting by her window in the spacious bedroom. Urgent need had brought the Lady of the Manor to her own home for a few hours and so she was entertained to lunch by an exceedingly good-looking young man that she was forced to assume was Mrs. Herriot's son.

'Don't worry about lunch,' he had said, 'She's an old friend of mine, Don't give it another thought. I'll make your apologies and explain things and entertain her, too.' But the anxiety by no means left the weary eyes of the Little White Lady. They searched his face. She felt too weak to make an effort to put her thoughts into tactful language.

'Will you promise to behave properly?' she managed.

Dr. Dick grinned in delight. It was just what Aunt Louisa might have said, twenty years earlier, before he went to his party tea at the Manor.

'Yes, I will behave properly and not be greedy and throw cake about,' he said, hugely delighted.

'She wont remember me, anyway. You just lie here and rest.'

The Lady of the Manor hardly had time to see if her beautiful furniture had been scratched before Dick arrived to welcome her.

He was immediately taken for young Mr. Herriot so made no attempt to correct the mistake and when she spoke of 'your mother's poor heart' he let it pass without comment. Dick was extremely good. He admired and agreed with all the Large Lady said and treated her with the deference expected. The lunch was a great success. Young Mr. Herriot was charming. But how strange none of Mrs. Herriot's friends should have mentioned him, she thought. Possibly he lived abroad and had been summoned home on account of his mother's illness. He was both vivacious and amusing and she began to feel her recent trips for face massage and to a new clothing store in Bond street had been worth while.

The meal was nearly over when Dick cut himself a piece of cake and thought it time to recall a story he had heard of a young boy of seven who had been to a birthday party in that very same room. He described it in detail as having been told to him by a friend who had studied medicine with him in Aberdeen, a young Dick Cameron.

‘Probably my mother-in-law was here at the time,’ murmured the Large Lady, ‘we were not deeply attached.’

Dick described the scene at the tea-table in graphic manor; the final fiasco; the cruel punishment at home. ‘She was an old tartar, wasn’t she?’ said Dick. The Lady of the Manor agreed, visibly ageing beneath his candid gaze. Young Mr. Heriot continued happily with his cake.

‘It may seem trivial to us,’ he continued, ‘but that little chap lost his faith in all things. He lost his friend and hero, the curate, his little prayers were not answered and everything seemed against him. He finished up sobbing on his mother’s grave. He is now an avowed agnostic. I believe he dates his first loss of faith to that experience. It is such a pity your mother-in-law ever gave a party, don’t you think?’

But the Large Lady was consulting her watch and expressing anxiety about her train.

‘Must you go?’ asked Dick, innocently, ‘I am so sorry. I shall tell Dick Cameron I have told you that sad story.’

The large brown eyes continued to dazzle her but a few minutes later the carriage arrived and with his broad shoulders and strong arms he graciously helped her through its open door.

Mrs. Herriot looked grave and the recital of the talks in the dining room failed to amuse her, although with much delighted laughter Dick recounted the whole of it.

‘So now,’ he concluded, ‘have paid off all the old score. I always swore I would do it. I’ve waited twenty yours but I have done it at last. I am even with them both. Little seven year old Dickey is avenged and I can start afresh.’

‘My dear young doctor,’ said the Little White Lady, ‘I doubt very much that that will be the end of it. No good ever comes of taking vengeance. A generous forgiveness is the only possible answer. It appals me to think of the bitterness harbouring in your heart all those years. You may have hurt them but you have hurt yourself more. And you will certainly have made two bitter enemies.’

Seeing the look of distress in her eyes, Dick said, ‘Don’t be sad, they can’t hurt me anymore now. Anyway one nice thing was that she thought I was your son. That pleased me no end. I should have like that.’

At last he had a smile from her. She laid her hand gently on his. ‘I should have like that, too. But as your mother I would have had many an anxious moment, I fear.’

His whole mood softened as he carried her into the garden for tea.

Sometime after this it was decided that Mrs. Herriot could begin again her afternoon drives along the surrey lanes and the wide roads on the common above Dinglevale.

The old village women loved to see her passing. Her carriage, with its high-stepping pair of matching dappled-grey horses seemed to come out of a past century. Her sweet smile and gentle courtesy caused them to drop long-forgotten curtsies and men labouring in the fields sometimes touched their caps. She brought back a sense of dignity to the village.

With the passing of a great Queen and a great century some of the spirit of courtesy and gracious manners seemed to have gone too. It was all rush and pushing and England was invaded by a spirit of liberty, equality and fraternity which seemed to the Little white Lady to mean wanting to step up at the expense of those who were higher and a liberty to grab the things of others.

However, Mrs. Herriot began again to enjoy her drives and Dick continued regularly to ride his bicycle through the common to visit the distant Rectory and see his patient slowly recovering. These were no longer urgent calls but ones he chose to do after that first Sunday morning when he was told there was no hope of a recovery.

His friendly calls were simply for his own pleasure and by his own strong will and determination to make sure his patient was not failing to take up life again.

With his usual quick and sensitive intuition he had discovered her life held few of the things which actually did make life worth living.

On one such sunny afternoon as Mrs. Herriot leaned back, enjoying the cool breeze, the scent of golden gorse, the songs of soaring larks, his bicycle bell had tingled sharply and Dick Cameron had shot past her carriage with a wave. This chance meeting had given a final touch to her pleasure that day and she thought long on how much the bright companionship of her young doctor had come to mean to her.

Resting later in her drawing room she found a letter from one of her dearest friends. Myra, although married to one of the richest earls in Scotland, loved to sign her name simply, Mrs. Airth. She had longed, above all, just to be a wife and mother but now found herself to be one of the most sought after hostesses in the land. So Mrs. Herriot knew she would now have all the latest news. A sense of pleasurable anticipation awoke within her. She could almost smell the sweet heather away in the highland moor. She knew she would be amused by an account of her intimate friends and their doings at a recent Scottish house-party.

The letter seemed at once to bring her again into touch with the life she had temporarily laid aside and loved. Dick Cameron was amusing and a very dear boy but he did not know her friends and never had been part of her kind of life and probably never would be. Their tacitly understood ways would probably always be beyond him.

In the gracious friendliness of her warm heart she admired his strong character and undoubted skill. But as the quiet summer weeks spent in the seclusion of this Surrey village slowly passed, a sense of loneliness and isolation of spirit had crept over her. It was a loneliness she had hardly been conscious of until this letter from one of her most intimate friends suddenly put her in touch with the society she loved, the little world of people who regularly came to her town house in Park Lane, counting it a privilege to drop in and holding her in highest esteem. Her frail health had suddenly denied her their visits and so a flush of excitement tinted the hot cheeks as she unfolded the letter.

Her gentle smile of pleasure held through the first two pages. Then it faded suddenly and a hot flush mounted to her brow and an indignant light shone in her eyes. She looked young and suddenly vulnerable but strangely alert.

There was a long silence in the room.

Mrs. Herriot had crumpled the letter suddenly then just as quickly smoothed it out again. It was characteristic of Mrs. Herriot that she bore this painful news silently and with folded hands. She had passed through many such hard moments in her life.

This seemed to her almost the hardest. But the more her spirit writhed at the injustice and the shame, the calmer her outward appearance became. In her bewildered pain she was trying to cling to some kind of justice. At last she said, aloud, and with conviction. 'It is entirely his own fault and mine, for not realising where his foolish behaviour would lead. But now, the question is, what to do to put the matter right.'

Then she listened anxiously for Dick's step in the hall. When he arrived at last the smoothed letter lay in her lap. How complete a change had been made by the advent of one letter. The peaceful home and the sunny drawing room were now charged with tense emotion. Myra's letter had reduced to shattered fragments the peace and happiness of these two who had received it. It was handed to him without a word.

Mrs. Herriot glanced at Dr. Dick's broad and angry back as he stood by the window to read it. She waited for his reply. He was so angry, words that crowded into his mind were not fit for the Little White Lady's gentle presence so they were held in check. He didn't want to add to the pain and perplexity already lining the delicate face. The letter was fragrantly scented with an embossed coronet at the top but these supplied to Dick no balm for the cruel wounds it had inflicted. In fact it made him more irritable. The only smell he really liked was antiseptic and he was too much of a socialist to be influenced by coronets.

At last he spoke.

'I'm very, very sorry that you should have the bother of this, Mrs. Herriot. It is a lot of gossip making a scandal out of nothing.'

'It is hardly nothing,' said Mrs. Herriot, gently. 'Besides, it doesn't make it better to say hard things about my friends. Lady Airth's letter is written with a kind and generous spirit. She simply feels it right to let me know what people are saying. It undoubtedly originated with the lady of the house - after her visit here. I do have a young man staying here - who was passed off as my son. There was an attempt to conceal him under the couch when

the Rector visited. Naturally, my friends do not believe such a story but they will want to hear me deny it all. You did not set anyone right, did you? On each occasion you were playing your own game, regardless of the consequences, my dear young doctor. Your presence has caused a scandal among my friends and it is in connection with me.'

Dick turned from the window and looked at Mrs. Herriot. He had never seen her appear so old and frail.

'It's absurd,' he said, 'all your friends must know it is absurd. At your age you can do what you want to. I mean, my own mother would only be fifty,' he finished, lamely.

'I might almost be your grandmother,' Mrs. Herriot smiled, 'but no woman is ever old enough to be beyond the reach of scandal, and that was said to me by one of the greatest ladies of the realm.'

Dick saw the smile and sat nearer the couch, twisting his strong brown fingers in and out of the fringe of her rug. 'You have some great friends, then?' he questioned.

Mrs. Herriot looked at him gently amused.

'My dear boy,' she said, 'you would be surprised if you saw a list of the friends I possess today. Do you know that if this story is as widely circulated as I fear, I shall be required to make an explanation to several royal ladies - that is, if they graciously allow me to do so.'

But Dick came of a long line of Camerons and their only explanation had always been a swift drawing of the sword.

'Why should we bother to explain? We know we were doing nothing wrong. If people choose to believe a pack of lies, well - let them!'

But that confident 'we' was a great mistake on Dick's part. At that moment Mrs. Herriot was back in thought in her charming drawing room in Park Lane and could almost hear her friend, the eminent psychiatrist, Sir Deryck Brand, speaking with great deference and kindness in her defence.

Into this gracious, mental atmosphere Dick's uncompromising 'we' was flung with as much damage as the stone that went crashing through St. Peter's halo, so long ago.

The Little White Lady bridled. With a quick movement she flung away the rug he was holding and sat very erect against the cushions. 'Indeed, you

hardly realise the impossible situation your folly has placed me. I shall, of course, make it clear you are here as my medical attendant but I must also be able to say that you are here no longer. Will it suit your plans to return to town tomorrow morning?’

Dick looked searchingly at Mrs. Herriot. He had never before seen her so anxiously troubled. He suddenly realised how cruelly she had been hurt by the Lady of the Manor’s spiteful travesty of the facts and, by implication, all the Rector had told her.

‘I’m so sorry for all this bother,’ he said, gently. ‘It is my fault, and of course I will leave here at once. Tonight if you like.’
‘No, not tonight,’ she said, ‘tomorrow morning, early, that will be soon enough. I shall reply to this by the afternoon post. Where do you stay in town?’

‘I have rooms with a friend in Chelsea. I can turn up at a moment’s notice. I hope to improve on rooms when I get a practice of my own. I can’t remember,’ Dick continued slowly, ‘I can’t remember having a real home but these delightful weeks with you have seemed more like my ideal of home life than anything.’ He looked out of the window. A few hours before this would have brought a warm response from Mrs. Herriot but the letter was too fresh in her mind.

‘Needless to say we none of us believe it, but the story goes that a young man has been staying with you at Dinglevale Manor, whom you pass off to visitors as your son, home from abroad but that he is known in the village as a ne'er-do-well who left the village in disgrace some years ago.’ Indignant, apologetic and affectionate sentences followed but through it all ran an earnest desire from all her friends to know that this tiny little spark of flame was not belching forth the black smoke of the lurid imagination of the Large Lady of the Manor.

And here sat the spark and not a very penitent one either. It was not easily extinguished.

She had forgotten the beginning of it all and her extreme need of him. It seemed, at this moment, that it had all started with a bunch of golden roses and a pair of earnest, brown eyes, very tender and solicitous. Her lonely, mother heart had responded with increasing affection.

'I have been a foolish old woman,' she said to herself, 'and my folly deserves all this outrageous punishment. What did I know of this young man, except that he was a remarkably clever doctor with a gift of diagnosis and a knowledge of remedies.'

Aloud she said 'I, er, must ask you, I've been meaning to. I've often meant to ask you about your fee. It's been a long course of treatment and very careful attention. I must be very largely in your debt. You will let me have your account before you go?'

A dull, red flush crept into Dr. Dick's tanned cheeks. The mention of his fee so close to his sentimental words about a sense of home that his stay at the Manor had given him was almost a snub although he instinctively knew it was not meant to be.

But his eyes hardened. 'You owe me nothing. I was merely acting as your own local doctor would have done. Your kind hospitality, the honour of your friendship and the pleasure of your company has more than repaid any medical services I was able to give.'

The formality and stiffness of his tone was so overdone that Mrs. Herriot looked for the normal twinkle in his eye but it wasn't there. 'Very well,' she responded, gently. 'It puts our friendship first which is exceedingly kind of you. Now, may I remind you that you promised to show me the letter you received this morning from your friend the Kensington doctor about the practice and the terms for purchase.'

Dick drew out his pocketbook in silence and gravely handed her the letter. He was too deeply hurt to take notice of her interest in his affairs.

Mrs. Herriot slipped the letter into her velvet bag, then rising, she held out her hand to Dick. She looked at him with an anxious little smile. 'Let's take a last turn together round the old garden,' she said, 'then I must send for Ellen. I'm very tired and I shall dine alone tonight. When we are both back in town I shall send for golden roses from the florist all through the year and we will keep them in a silver vase in the drawing room to remind us of happy summer days at the Manor House.'

The gentle 'we' was neatly done. It counteracted the snub a few minutes before. It forgave Dick his use of it and also included him in a possible Park

Lane program. But Dick was by no means encouraged. It would take more than a sentimental illusion to yellow roses to restore his equilibrium.

He drew Mrs. Herriot's hand within his arm and went silently round the garden.

Chapter 9.

Dick lingered over dinner. It was his last at the Manor House and he was eating alone.

He was served with the same care and kindness as if Mrs. Herriot herself had been downstairs. No message had been brought down asking him to go up and say goodnight to his patient and he felt shut out and somehow disgraced. The injustice of all this annoyed him. Out in the soft darkness a grasshopper chirped and Dick threw his peach stone in the direction of the cheerful sound. The astonished silence gave him some pleasure and he wished he could throw stones at all the Little White Lady's friends and stop their silly gossiping. 'Here we are,' he thought, 'under exactly the same conditions as yesterday, as we have been for weeks, and neither of us have done anything to be ashamed of. Now she holds me at arm's length and gives me my dismissal. And then puts our friendship on a purely professional level and asks for my bill. She must see that that puts that old scandal-monger in the right and me in the wrong.'

Then he began to think darkly about the future.

He would have to go back to his lodgings in Chelsea. Mrs. Herriot had made him feel so much at home he had thought seriously of being with her in Park Lane. A home there was a very desirable one and one from which great things might be accomplished in his medical history. Now, he realised, his prospects were vague and uncertain.

He did not regret for one minute, even now, that he had taken revenge. But why was it costing him so dear? He would get even with the Large Lady yet. The door opened slowly and Ellen Ransom came in handing him an envelope. There was a certain understanding between them and Dick felt brighter. Here was one, firm and unswerving, who held him safely bound to her mistress.

‘Apparently I am not needed any more, Ellen, I am leaving tomorrow,’ he said, disconsolently.

‘The wisest people sometimes cut off their own noses to spit their face,’ she said, sagely. ‘However, doctor, I am to bid you goodnight and to say she is feeling more rested and expects to sleep soon. But will you please to leave an address.’

‘All right, Ellen and, thank you and goodnight then.’
As the door closed behind her, Dick took up Mrs. Herriot’s envelope. Ellen’s calm assuring manner was somehow consoling. Inside the envelope was his friend’s letter about the practice and a smaller envelope which said, ‘Read letter first.’

He unfolded the sheet and read;

My dear Young Doctor,
I find it difficult adequately to express my thanks for all you have done for me. But I am perfectly conscious that your skill has me a new lease of life. This is a gift which can hardly be repaid and there can be no question of anything adequate in the shape of a fee for all you care. But I do want to do something for you in return. Also I want to make quite sure of having you always at hand, in the future, as my medical advisor. Therefore I wish you to allow me the great pleasure of supplying you with the sum required to purchase the partnership in the Kensington practice. Do not look on it as a gift or pain me by refusing it. It is simply something you have honestly earned. It is also an investment to ensure my own future comfort. I have never written a cheque with more pleasure. I part with you tomorrow in the happy expectation that I will find you established in town when I return. May the divine blessing rest upon your future life and work. Such will be the constant prayer of your old friend and grateful

patient.’

Helen Raeburn Herriot.

Tearing open the smaller envelope, Dick found Mrs. Herriot’s cheque

Carefully made out in her delicate handwriting for the full amount he needed to buy into the practice. For some minutes he sat quite still, mechanically folding and unfolding the cheque.

After a bemused silence his mind became alert again and he sprang to his feet.

‘Ellen, Ellen,’ he called, ‘I must see her.’

‘But she hasn’t sent for you, Mr. Dick.’

‘I must see her, Ellen, please.’

Ellen smiled grimly but withdrew her hand from the door to the bedroom and stalked off with further protest.

Dick Cameron went softly into the room. It was largely in shadow but there was one reading lamp close to the head of the couch.

The Little White Lady lay very still, in a soft dressing-gown of grey cashmere, her Bible open on her lap. She looked up as Dick entered.

‘I had to come,’ said Dick, softly.

He knelt down beside the couch and took her hand in both his - the frail little hand that had just given him his great start in life.

For the second time that day, Dick Cameron found speech impossible. In the afternoon he had been dumb with anger, now he was dumb with gratitude. He looked helplessly at the hand he held twisting the ring she wore as if the gleam of the gems might give him inspiration. At last, lifting his eyes, he looked into her face. Tears ran silently down her cheeks but her eyes were full of tenderness.

‘You are too good to me,’ said Dick brokenly and suddenly laid his forehead on the hand he held.

She lifted her left hand and laid it gently on the bowed head. ‘God bless you, dear boy,’ she said.

Dick knelt on for a few minutes, conscious only of a touch of blessing.

Then she removed her hand and, rising silently, he turned to leave the room. Pausing at the door, he looked back.

She lay with her eyes closed and her hands resting on her Bible. The lamp shed a halo of golden light around the sweet, calm face and silvery hair.

Dr. Dick closed the door softly and went downstairs. A sense of her benediction went with him.

In the hall Dick found his bicycle where it always stood, ready for sudden need. He wheeled it out and rode off rapidly across the park and down into the village.

He turned in at the Rectory gate where, years before, he had run into great-aunt Louisa cutting her roses. He left his bike and made his way into the quiet churchyard, slipping through the same hedge. He stood there, in the moonlight, beside his young mother's grave. The marble cross gleamed white against the purple shadows. He could clearly see 'Aged 26' and he suddenly realised he was now older than she had been when they laid her there. He stood quite still, a sense of pitying tenderness stirring at his heart. He seemed to see a huddled little figure in a flannel shirt, sobbing out all the shame and pain of that miserable day. He remembered how the little boy had said, 'I am never going to pray again in my whole life. But I'll come out on top of everything, always. And I'll do it myself.'

He had certainly kept his word about coming out on top. Not once had he failed in an examination. He had made the most of every chance. And tonight, at a bound, he was within definite sight of the top. Once established in town, nothing would be able to stop his steady advance. It might be uphill and take years of strenuous endeavour, but he would get there. He had felt all along that the Little White Lady was his mascot. He was immensely grateful to her but, after all, he had saved her life or at least prolonged it. But just now he was making the mistake of supposing that someone with a much larger bank account than his own could well afford a large cheque without missing it. Mrs. Herriot, however, unknown to Dick, had had to be very careful and to carefully consider which of her investments she could most easily sell to meet this sudden call on her account.

Dick looked at the porch where he had first met the Little White Lady and suddenly recalled her words, 'I fear your broken halo in the church window stands for an outward and visible sign of an inward and spiritual loss.' He had been too long, he felt, standing in the darkened churchyard. 'Poor Mummy,' he said, aloud. 'I wonder if you would have lived if you had gone with your soldier love. But you stayed behind so as not to leave your little boy. Yet, all the same, you did leave him. Now you lie here and your beloved lies in the veldt with a bullet in his heart. Your hair was so soft and you were so pretty, I wish I could think you were together.' Dick turned, sadly, from the unresponsive grave.

Then, seized by a sudden need of living, understanding, human sympathy, he found his bicycle, rode up the hill and across the common, turning into the gate of that other Rectory he had left only that afternoon. Skirting the drive and shunning the front entrance, he came to the rustic porch at the back of the house. The veranda was wreathed in a cluster of rambling roses and a woman in a white gown lay back on a low garden chair.

She was a tall, long-limbed girl, lying listlessly with her hands folded and she was wrapped in a crimson, velvet cloak. Her beautiful face was pale. She saw Dick coming across the lawn. She gave him a smile of welcome. She was pleased. Her voice was low and sweet.

‘Well,’ she said, ‘a late visit. Are you trying to catch me disobeying orders?’

‘No,’ he said. ‘I just knew I would find you here on such a lovely night.’

‘Then why does the doctor come to visit his patient so late?’

‘Margaret,’ said Dick, ‘I needed to talk to someone.’ He leaned forward as he sat down on a low chair and looked eagerly at the white shadowy figure so near. ‘And, anyway, my orders include that you forget you have ever been an invalid.’ Then his voice took on a note of enthusiasm.

‘I just had to tell you, Margaret, I have had my chance. I told you I should. I’ve earned enough to buy that partnership in town. I expect to start at once and I shall be leaving tomorrow, early. I couldn’t go without telling you but I’ve also come to say goodbye. More than anyone else, you will realise what this means to me. I know I told you once I never prayed but I dare say your prayers carried weight. So,. In a moment of weakness, I wanted someone to be pleased for me.’

He paused abruptly.

‘Dick,’ said the deep, quiet voice, and a slim white hand was laid in his strong grasp. ‘Dick, I am more than pleased. And I am very thankful. Of course I prayed. I know how much this means to you.’ She hesitated.

‘I seem to see that cake being flung across the room and the curate’s waistcoat with the tea covering it. Do you remember that party?’

I can see you now. I don’t know why that should come back to me so vividly now. Perhaps there’s some subconscious connection. I giggled and I was severely reprimanded.’ She laughed gently. ‘Anyway, Dick, I do congratulate you. I may laugh now but it is almost with tears. It means I shall lose you. But I mustn’t be selfish after all you have done to help me

back to health. I really desire nothing better than your future success and that all your London patients will prosper from your visits as I have done.'

They said goodbye and she gazed after him as he waved from the edge of the darkened lawn.

She wondered how she was going to live without his joy and vitality and the promise of his visits.

Chapter 10.

During the days which followed Dick Cameron's departure, Mrs. Herriot found it difficult to explain or understand her own feelings.

At first there was immense relief in the fact that, if her friends visited, they would not find a strange young man sitting in the garden by her side. Her friends had written making light of all the gossip and saying how absurd it all was but this was after the hurt had been inflicted and after the delicate spirit of the Little White Lady had been through such pain.

Dick had been dismissed and the damage had been done. The Ronald Wests had written from Gleneesh Castle, where they were staying with Jane, claiming Dick as a great friend whose skill and devotion had been worth everything during Ronnie's breakdown the year before. And Jane wrote saying how much his friendship meant to her. But Mrs. Herriot missed his presence. It was no good explaining to Ellen Ransome all the marvellously intimate interests they had had together over the birds and especially the robin's cheese. She would just have said 'Indeed, madam,' and shown her disapproval of Dr. Dick's sudden departure by being more stern than usual. Mrs. Herriot's walks around the garden were devoid of interest. Dick had gone and the exciting, eventful days became increasingly boring and flat.

It was so long since she had had strong, young life about her which had been so vitalising. She missed Dick physically as well as mentally. It was quite possible she might have called him had it not been for the happy and grateful letter arriving from him, full of all he was doing and arranging in

town. So she suffered in her solitude, and all the more because she felt she may have acted hastily and on impulse. Into this atmosphere, another letter arrived from the Countess of Airth.

My dear Helen,

Are you now well enough for callers? If so I should be very grateful if you could see a cousin of mine. She is a dear girl who has been extremely ill. Her name is Margaret Royston, the wife of a near neighbour to you, the Rector in the next village.

I must tell you a little about her. She was the eldest of five and a vicar's daughter, doing everything in the church playing the organ, training the choir, arranging the flowers, in fact everything an artistic, musical girl would love to do. It seemed a very suitable thing for her to marry the new Rector and move into the Rectory. If she could have married the Rectory leaving out the Rector, Eustace, all would have been well. I am afraid he is what I call a life-slayer. And he has steadily but surely clipped Margaret's wings and chilled all her enthusiasms. He blows out every torch which he did not light himself. His sole form of sport is clock golf and Margaret looks on admiringly and keeps the score.

Oh, dear, my dear Helen, here I go gossiping again. You will reprimand me but I do feel a visit from you or an invitation to see you would so help her recovery from pneumonia and, I think, some heart trouble, too. She doesn't seem able to rouse herself from lethargy in her convalescing and her letters clearly reveal this.

Margaret is now a silent, self-contained woman where only five years ago she was full of enthusiasms and her music used to pour forth like the song of the lark. But she has been very ill although I still feel she is like a winter crocus waiting to burst forth out of frozen earth anyway.

Oh, dear, supposing, like me, she met a real, virile man. I still remember the day Jim and I met and the feeling of being completely swept off my feet. But, of course, we were both free, thank Heaven.'

Mrs. Herriot smiled as she folded the letter. 'Myra's imagination, I hope, will not get her into trouble but she is so loyal to her friends.'

So she went straight to her desk and wrote a note asking if she might visit the Rectory in the next village.

And soon after three o'clock the Little White Lady found herself driving over the common to that distant invalid to whom, all unknown to her, Dick had so often sped on his bicycle.

'Yes, it was Dick,' said Margaret, 'of course it was Dick. It could have been no one else. We thought he was a stranger at first but I was too ill at the time to notice very much of him. Mother told me he came in an old blazer and tennis shoes and Eustace wanted to stop him coming into my room. But stopping Dick is more easily said than done. The whole house was obeying him without question in about three minutes.'

Mother was in raptures of silent thanksgiving when Eustace went to his study and Dick took control, changing everything and doing things himself.'

Mrs. Herriot smiled. 'He certainly has a commanding way in an emergency,' she said. 'I remember how soon Ellen, a most difficult person to manage, humbly did what she was told.'

'I remember suddenly opening my eyes,' Margaret continued like an unstoppable fountain, 'to see Dick close by and saying, 'It's all right, you are going to get better You are going to live.'

I was looking up into his eyes and he was smiling. I managed to mumble, 'how do you know?' And he said, 'because I am going to make you better. I am going to pull you through this.' There didn't seem to be any answer then but afterwards, every time I felt low, I would say to myself 'he is going to get me through it all.'

There was a pause for breathe. Then she said, 'Do you remember how bright his eyes were and how brown?'

Margaret leaned back suddenly exhausted, looking past her visitor with dreamy eyes. She was trying to recapture the feelings of hope and possibilities.

'Yes,' said the Little White Lady gently. 'I thought them the brightest eyes I have ever seen.'

Mrs. Herriot used the next few, quiet moments to study more closely the beautiful, oval face, the broad, low forehead from which the soft hair grew in abundant waves with gleams of gold in its rich darkness, the sensitive mouth

showing a droop of sadness. Dark shadows beneath the eyes and the white transparency of the hands showed the fact of her severe illness. But there was about Margaret Royston a look of returning health and beauty and a promise of complete recovery.

But Mrs. Herriot wondered if life held something to make the full radiance of perfect health hardly worth recovering.

Mrs. Herriot's loving heart went out to this girl before her with understanding. She knew, at that moment, that she was dealing with a mind opening and expanding to her touch. The loss of self-control brought about by long weakness and the unexpected luxury of a sympathetic listener showed Mrs. Herriot there would be few barriers to their friendship but she also knew that delicacy and tact would be needed.

She did not want Margaret confiding anything she may not feel comfortable to have said. Mrs. Herriot looked around the pretty drawing room. The style and atmosphere showed excellent taste. Margaret, she now knew, paid the bills, so Margaret had been left free to furnish as she pleased. The crude whitewashed circle with Roman figures on the lawn she saw through the open windows, was the clock golf.

Myra's imagination had not been at fault. Mrs. Herriot broke the silence carefully hoping to bring Margaret down to earth gently. 'It is a pity doctors don't more often realise the effect on a patient's mind of a mental suggestion.'

'Well,' said Margaret, 'so far everyone else had thought I was going quietly to heaven. Eustace told me I was going through the valley of the shadow of death and my dear Mother had entrusted me with a tender message for my sister who died when she was tiny so I was sinking away until Dick came and held out a hand to which I could cling. You know he was sent for unexpectedly in the middle of a Sunday breakfast and stuffed everything in his pockets he thought he might need.'

He told me afterwards it was the Sunday morning in June when he looked after you in the church porch. He said how wonderful he thought it was he should be carrying everything needed for heart failure.'

'I see,' said the Little White Lady, gently. So these two had talked together about her and if there was pain in her eyes the smile on her lips concealed it.

‘Then it is all explained how he had everything needed,’ she said. ‘It was fortunate for me. I don’t think he would have had time to fetch anything.’
‘No, said Margaret, her sensitive spirit stirred, ‘Dick told me there was not a moment to lose.’

‘Then he has talked to you about me?’
Margaret turned, startled into quietness. She spoke more carefully.
‘Yes, but not as a patient. It was always as a kind and wonderful friend. You cannot know how much living at the Manor has meant to him. All his life he has been so homeless and alone. I well remember the pleasure on his face when he spoke of you. And he would look at his watch sometimes and say ‘Oh, dear, it is tea time, I must not keep my Little White Lady waiting!’

‘Is that what he called me?’
‘Yes, isn’t it lovely, and his voice always softened. Do you know the story of how he broke the halo in the church? I often thought Dick grew up believing in nothing and nobody. Almost an agnostic. But he believed you Mrs. Herriot. We were friends when we were young, always together and then his father took him away and I didn’t see him until I became ill. Only,’ she hesitated, then continued in sudden agitation, ‘Mrs. Herriot, I have prayed for him all those years and now to find he had no belief whatever, when we finally met again, . . .’

‘My dear,’ said Mrs. Herriot, almost sternly, ‘don’t say agnostic in the same tone of voice you might use for a murderer. It was invented by Professor Huxley in 1885 to show the attitude of those who needed absolute proof. They neither accept nor reject but simply say, ‘I don’t know.’ But the term is much older than that. Do you remember the honest agnostic in the bible who raised at Athens the altar to the Unknown God and Paul then preached about the God he knew. We must respect their doubts and try to prove the reality of our faith by our love.’

Margaret’s luminous grey eyes searched the quiet face of her visitor.
‘I wish you could talk to Eustace. He and Dick had such arguments.’
‘I never argued with Dick,’ said Mrs. Herriot, ‘and I don’t suppose my opinion would carry any weight with you husband, my dear child. I try, in my humble way, to live what I believe. That broken halo stood for more than just shattered glass. It was the wrecking of a child’s faith and ideals. Poor

little boy. We who love him must strive to restore to him by faith and patience, his broken halo.'

Suddenly, without any warning, Margaret burst into a flood of tears. She buried her face in her hands and sobbed, uncontrollably.

Mrs. Herriot said nothing. She rose and went to the window, looking out onto the rustic veranda with its clustering roses. She wondered how often Dick's lively presence had made it a place of more than sunshine. Presently the sobs grew fainter and finally ceased.

She realised how well she must be as this long and now suddenly, emotional visit did not tire her in the least. In fact the Little White Lady began to see a purpose at last in all her bewildering circumstances of late.

She turned silently back into the room and laid her hand gently on the bowed head. 'Tell me about it, dear child,' she said.

'Its all very well to say 'we who love him,' began Margaret in a choking voice then broke off abruptly.

Mrs. Herriot let that pass then repeated gently, as though Margaret had not spoken, 'Tell me about it,' she said, again.

'Oh, dear, you must think I am so foolish to be so distraught. I hope you don't think so badly of me as to think I love Dick.'

Mrs. Herriot's gaze was an astonished question.

'My dear girl, I should think it very strange after all he has done for you and the sweet link from the past, if you did love him.'

'But I'm married, Mrs. Herriot,' cried Eustace's wife almost with the same tone he might have used himself.

There was an indignant flush on Mrs. Herriot's cheeks.

'I cannot believe that you should think like that,' she said. 'Surely you don't think there is only one kind of loving. Don't you know that a sweet, pure minded woman can give a man a strong and helpful love which would be like a bright shield between them in any kind of temptation or enticement?

It would remind him of a dead mother's love and prayers or a sister's kiss.

Surely the little Margaret who cared about him and his small troubles can give a calm, helpful love to the full-grown Dick if he needs her sympathy and

friendship?’ Mrs. Herriot paused. Her breathe came quickly. Her hand stole then to the place where there was apt to be a sudden stab.

While she spoke Margaret’s eyes had not left her face. Now a sudden light illumined her own. It was as if a heavy cloud had lifted. Her eyes shone, her mouth was sweet and noble in a sudden smile of tenderness.

For the first time Mrs. Herriot saw Margaret as she might have been, as she really was. ‘Oh, you are right. I was thinking only of myself. But I do feel that, that it maybe wrong that any man, well, who is not Eustace . . . Should have so great a hold on me as to make such a difference by his presence or absence.’

Mrs. Herriot answered with gentle earnestness. ‘I quite understand but I don’t think you must feel condemned in anyway at all. Will it help if I tell you that I, an old woman of over sixty, feel just the same way? There is nothing foolish or sentimental in the way we feel. It is his remarkable personality. It has a vivid and vital quality which acts like sunshine on a drooping plant. All doctors should be able to impart life and vitality as he does. For ordinary patients their health would be an end of it all but for you and me it means far more than that. For me, because he has become like a very dear son and companion. For you because of the tender, childish friendship. But for both of us because we earnestly desire his spiritual welfare. He saved your life and prolonged mine so this means he has the divine gift of two faithful friends and we must not allow any morbid selfishness on our part to stop our affection and prayers for him. That’s not too much to ask, is it?’

There was complete silence in the Rectory drawing room. An honest conscience was facing a difficult problem and striving to decide rightly. A woman’s heart, deep beyond all human soundings was trying to find solid ground to stand on.

Finally Margaret spoke. ‘Do you see my statue of Napoleon? It was stupidly expensive but I think it reminded me of Dick and that is why I bought it.’

Mrs. Herriot smiled, ‘Yes, I saw it was Dick as soon as I came in. Napoleon adored Josephine but he set his heel on her heart as he stepped to the

summit of his ambitions. I know. But he hurt himself more than he hurt her. It is Dick fighting seven devils and failing to cast them out.'

'He puts success in his profession - getting to the top of the tree, as he calls it before everything else,' countered Margaret. 'He congratulates himself on having nobody to consider, no home ties to hamper or hinder him but all unconsciously he loves you and staying at the Manor showed him there was so much more to life. Who could help but love you, Mrs. Herriot, anyway? You are so sweet and understanding. You have been so kind to let me talk.'

'Well, he has gone to town,' said Mrs. Herriot, 'and I return home soon so he will look after me there and I shall see him constantly.'
Margaret remembered something. 'He went so suddenly,' she said, 'and it was very strange, because he said he had come into the very sum he needed to buy the partnership in the nick of time.'

The Little White Lady's eyes turned to the top of the cabinet.

'Napoleons usually get what they want,' she observed, quietly, 'and usually just when they had determined to get it.'

'It has taken him away from us.'

'Yes, and left me very lonely,' said Mrs. Herriot. 'Do you think I could possibly persuade you to spend a few days with me? I would fetch you myself and take every care of you. It would give me immense pleasure, my dear, and give you a complete change without having to travel far.'

Margaret's delight was unmistakable. 'I should love it, if Eustace agrees.'

They both looked up and saw the black figure of the Rector advancing across the lawn.

Margaret had just time to smooth her hair and gown.

'My dear Margaret,' he said with mild reproof, 'have you omitted to ring for tea?' He turned his gaze on Mrs. Herriot. Margaret introduced her, blushing, as she rose to ring the bell.

'We are having a continuous spell of warm weather, Mrs. Herriot, most unusual.' 'We are,' assented the Little White Lady, 'most.' A silence followed. Then she glanced again at the figure of Napoleon.

‘He certainly is extraordinarily like Dick,’ she thought. ‘I wish he would leap down and help forward this conversation.’
‘Are you interested in clock-golf?’ asked the Rector.

Chapter 11

As soon as Mrs. Herriot was settled in town she made a point of inviting Dr. Dick Cameron to her apartments for supper. It was a gracious, formal invitation but included the opportunity for chess afterward. It was followed by a kind, affectionate letter.

My dear Young Doctor,

I feel I owe you an expression of my sincere regret that I was unduly concerned about my own reputation. I must assure you how greatly I have missed you. I gather, however, from your letter, that all things with you are working together for good. I earnestly hope that somehow, in the not too distant future, we may be able to resume in other surroundings, our pleasant home life together. Please look upon my house as a home, dear boy, and come and have meals with me and spend the evening as often as you can. Ellen and I will take great delight in preparing for you a study in my house in Park Lane where you may always count on undisturbed quiet. Let me know how you progress. Affectionately, your friend, H.R.H.

‘Good,’ said Dick to himself, ‘no more rotten meals here.’
Another letter arrived by the same post. This time in firm writing, full of character.

My dear Dick,

Your perfectly angelic Little White Lady has paid me a visit. My cousin, Myra Airth, wrote asking her to call. Dick, she is far more lovely than you ever told me. It almost took my breath away when she came in. She might have stepped straight out of a picture. And the closer you look the more lovely she is. Her face is like an exquisitely cut cameo and her delicate little hands so pretty. She tells me that because of her initials her

friends call her, Her Royal Highness, and sometimes, dear Princess, and I don't wonder. She is a very regal person yet so easy to talk to. Make no mistake though, Dick, she is very intuitive and far-seeing. She will weigh you up with swift and unerring judgement.'

Dick frowned and walked to the mantelpiece. He was unsmiling. So they knew each other. He was not pleased.

'I am quite excited. She is fetching me tomorrow to spend a few days with her. You know you advised change. Why don't you come down and see us?'
Your friend, Margaret.

It was too late. Margaret's letter was delayed and Mrs. Herriot was settled in her own house in town.

Dick knew he would not have gone back to Dinglevale. He would not, he vowed, go back, ever. Park Lane was his next move. The two women who loved Dick waited in vain.

Dick was beginning to be summoned further afield than his own actual practice. He had always inclined toward the line of study required in psychiatry and troubles of the mind. Each case successfully brought him two or three fresh patients and an ever-increasing reputation. The consulting-room in Harley Street began to seem not so far off. But he could not as yet afford to relinquish the partnership for which he had paid so high a price.

Mrs. Herriot soon became the enthusiastic sharer of all his hopes and plans. They played chess together most evenings and most evenings she won.

One particular evening he sat opposite her couch looking very much like the Capo di Monte Napoleon, his brows bent in a line of keen determination. 'Many of these cases,' he said, 'are too difficult to treat in their own homes. I'll tell you what I ought to have, what I shall have one day, a house of my own, run entirely on my own lines, where I shall be able to manage them properly and send them out cured. Some healthy place like Dinglevale with my own staff and a highly qualified matron. So much would depend on her she would have to be perfect and permanent. To ensure the latter I would probably have to marry her.'

Mrs. Herriot laughed and tried to look shocked.

‘My dear young doctor.’ she exclaimed. ‘As you see, I am trying hard to be shocked. You don’t marry merely to secure a capable assistant for professional purposes.’

‘Well I would,’ laughed Dick. ‘What better reason could there be?’

‘Where would love come in?’ inquired Mrs. Herriot, gently.

‘Love would not enter into my calculations. It would be a drag on the wheels and I like all the wheels to run free and unhampered.’

‘There are steep hills in life, dear boy and being the headlong driver you are, you may come to grief in the matter.’

‘Well, I’m not afraid,’ said Dick.

There was a silence. Mrs. Herriot wondered if her own story would help and teach him some of the lessons he needed to learn. It had often been on her mind. Was this the time?

But Dick was visualizing the lovely little bungalows he would have built and all the organisation necessary to put his theories into practice.

‘How much capital would you need to start your plan?’

‘Ten thousand pounds would do it,’ replied Dick without a moment’s hesitation. ‘And after that we would charge quite large fees.’

‘Margaret would have made a good matron,’ said Mrs. Herriot, as discreetly as she could, looking at her hands for a moment. ‘That is, were she not otherwise engaged. Margaret is a woman of remarkable ability and great personal charm.’

‘Margaret is over-Eustaced,’ said Dick, shortly, ‘and so she has a drag on every wheel. By the way, I am bringing in a specialist tomorrow and I want you to abide by his decisions.’

Mrs. Herriot was slightly shocked. ‘But I am guided by you. Your opinion is as good as any specialist. It is totally unnecessary.’

‘Well, I must insist,’ said Dick, seriously grave. ‘Sole charge is too great a responsibility now.’ Mrs. Herriot became suddenly quiet.

‘Dick,’ she said.

He started and stood up. It was the first time she had called him by his name. 'Dick, I want you to ask your specialist how long he gives me.'

'No, no, no,' said Dick. 'That would be a useless question. He could not possibly fix a date and neither could I. Anyway, it depends largely on the care I am able to give you. It bothers me, you know, that you are not on the telephone. How would Ellen get hold of me in the middle of the night? Will you let me order you one if I can't sleep here.'

'No, dear boy,' said Mrs. Herriot, firmly. 'Ellen doesn't like them and I like my privacy too much. Anyway, I like to see people face to face.' 'Ellen is a tiresome woman when she chooses.' Mrs. Herriot felt too tired to argue on behalf of Ellen. 'Well, we'll let your specialist decide,' she said.

The Little White Lady looked very frail just then, seated on the velvet sofa, a folding table in front of her with her Bible and chess men placed within reach. There was an appeal in her eyes as she looked at Dick which suddenly went to his heart.

'Oh, I do hate leaving you, let me fetch my things and come back,' he said. 'No, no, Ellen is quite capable. I'm troubled more for you than myself tonight. Now goodnight and God bless you. And after your specialist has been you can come back and tell me more about your progress with the dear lady who thinks things are going to jump out of all the cupboards at her and the poor girl who thinks she can't swallow.'

Mrs. Herriot always blessed him when he left her. She hoped her blessings would hover over him and come home to rest one day like little white doves. That night after Ellen bought her hot milk, Mrs. Herriot left her Bible lying in her lap unopened for awhile. There was a brooding silence while she toyed with Dick's red king so easily swept off the board by her own white queen once again.

She thought of all the cosy little bungalows, havens of hope for distraught minds and weakened wills.

At last she said to herself, 'It's a fine thing to have such a vision and an aim in life. But how is he to find the capital. I know he is young but it is so much. If only my money wasn't tied up so cruelly.'

She slipped the red king, from the middle of the board where she had place him, regally and alone, into the box, close the ivory lid and opened her Bible. There was holy stillness on the room. The Little White Lady was reading Psalm 127. 'Except the Lord build the house they labour in vain that build it. Except the Lord keep the city, the watchman wakes but in vain.'

In due course the specialist, a Sir James Montford, came and went again. Mrs. Herriot asked her question in spite of Dick and received a vague reply. 'How long have I got, Sir Montford?' 'My dear lady, a doctor cannot tell you that. With adequate care, no running up and down stairs, and so on.'

Dick had stood by the window while his Little White Lady was examined. He had given an impatient gesture. He had purposely chosen the specialist for his own ends. He did not want Mrs. Herriot to like him.

But when he watched the examination he had felt in himself as well, a curious dislike of the man which he found hard to explain. It was disquieting to see his own Little White Lady being touched by another man. In private, he had himself asked the specialist how long he thought Mrs. Herriot could stand the strains of such painful heart attacks and had been told that with close and watchful care perhaps she had two to three years.

'With all due respect, I disagree,' Dr. Cameron had replied. 'In any case, may dear man, who inherits?' Sir Montford said, bluntly. 'She is a very wealthy woman, you know. I remember years ago there was some scandal, twenty-five or thirty years, a suicide or murder or some such involving the name Herriot, and it is not a common name. Look up the will, my man, you may need to know.'

'I would think it highly unlikely I would do such a thing,' Dick had replied hotly. 'Mrs. Herriot is more to me than an ordinary patient. I am, I am much attached to her and in many ways she treats me more like a son. I feel the same respect as I should feel for my mother. I could not possibly pry into her affairs.'

‘Rubbish, my dear boy, all the more reason you should know how the land lies. There is no secret about a will, it is public property. However, please yourself in the matter. Take care of the little lady, anyway.’

Sir James gave a casual farewell and was whirled off to his next appointment. Dick closed the front door and took the stairs two at a time. It was an infinite relief to Dick to be alone with his patient again. He felt a rush of guilt at his own selfish disregard of her feelings when he turned into the room again to see her weary face on the pillow. He knelt quickly by the bedside taking her hand in his.

‘I’m so sorry. It has been very trying for you.’
‘Why did you ask him to come?’ she said, quietly, searching his face.
‘Did he say any more than I already know? Did he tell you how long?’

‘He said two or three years.’
‘And did my own dear doctor agree with that?’
‘I think twenty years with the care I intend to give you.’
‘And did you tell this to Sir James?’ Dick hesitated for a fraction of a second. ‘I said I did not agree with him.’
‘What did he say to that?’
‘He said, Ah, well, time will tell.’
‘That was clever,’ said Mrs. Herriot with a gentle smile.

‘Now we must call Ellen if I am to be down for tea. I shall expect you this evening and now I mustn’t waste any more of your time.’
But Dick did not rise at once. His eyes were bright with an intensity of feeling and there was something in the atmosphere which sounded a warning note to Mrs. Herriot. There seemed something Dick wanted to say but for the moment he could not find the words. The sense of his being there as her doctor was suddenly obscured by the vivid remembrance of a handsome young man sending golden roses in a silver vase and telling Ellen they were ‘a fit emblem of her own golden heart.’

She gently withdrew her hands and said, ‘Go now, dear boy, I’m tired and wish to be alone.’
She closed her eyes as final dismissal. But he didn’t rise at once and she felt his lips very gently brush her hand.

Then the door closed behind him.

On the pavement outside Dick hesitated. His firm foundations seemed shaken. It had filled him with an altogether unreasonable annoyance to see another man listening to the heart of his Little White Lady. It had caused her suddenly to become dearer to him than she had ever been before. She was too good. Too lovely for this noisy vulgar world. Yet, she could not and should not leave it, if his care and skill could hold her.

On the hard, solid pavement Dick was experiencing emotion, very slight, but so far emotion of any kind had played no part in his onward march through life.

It had all been calculated, coldly clear, and decisions made with a single aim to reach the top.

This awakening emotion had originated with his indignant reply to Sir James and he remembered it now. 'I am, I am much attached to Mrs. Herriot. She treats me like a son.'

He suddenly felt unable to give his mind to the patients waiting for his visit.

He called a cab at last and went to his club.

There he spent some time looking over the notes left him by Sir James and then gave himself to silent meditation.

Margaret would have thought him even more like Napoleon and remembered Mrs. Herriot's words, 'This is Dick not at his best. It is Dick fighting seven devils and failing to cast them out.'

Presently he rose and went out into the street. His look of certainty had returned. There was to be no drag on his wheels and his rapid stride was full of decision. Dick's temporary lapse into emotion was over and with it passed the hesitancy which was so foreign to his nature.

He would read the Herriot will.

Chapter 13

The next evening Mrs. Herriot became conscious of Dick's sombre gaze. She began to give studied attention to her reading lamp and did not look at

him. As she bent forward, carefully lowering the wick, a little smile of gentle amusement played about her lips. Dick saw it and it suddenly angered him. 'If there is a joke,' he said, 'don't you think we might share it?'

The Little White Lady turned her kind eyes upon him. 'Oh, you dear boy,' she said, 'I was thinking of your perfect matron who was to be made permanent. Your reasons for entering into the holy estate of matrimony are as original as they are varied. You would have to rewrite the prayer-book and put in a complete new list.'

'If you laugh at me, Mrs. Herriot,' said Dick, between his teeth, 'I shall leave the house.'

The sparkle of the Little White Lady's humour was instantly veiled by her tenderness. Dick's strength and tenacity of purpose were beginning to reassert themselves.

'Now, look here,' he said, and his voice was firm and decided. All signs of restless uncertainty had gone from him completely. 'The time has come to take this thing seriously. I've had enough of being non-resident 'doctor-in-residence.' I'm a little more than a doctor and little less than a son. Neither of these states,' he continued, with vigour, 'serve the purpose of the incessant, watchful care you need. Even the added years of life that Sir James Montford speaks of cannot be ensured by my comings and goings like this.'

He paused. The world seemed to stand still for one breathless moment, arrested by the sudden break in the torrent of words. 'Well?' said the Little White Lady, with calm dignity.

Dick drew near and took her hands in his and bent his head to gaze at them. He didn't raise his eyes at her gentle and unfaltering question.

'I want you to marry me, Mrs. Herriot, to give me the right and the needed position, to give you the full measure of care we now know to be necessary.' There was a long silence in the room, broken only by the clock, which now seemed to be ticking away very loudly. The hands he held were not withdrawn. For a moment they gripped his then relaxed their hold.

Had he raised his head, Dick would have seen varied expressions flitting across that lovely face. First, speechless astonishment, then fear, then

indignation. From flushing to a great pallor, then the usual calm peacefulness at last.

But Dick did not lift his eyes in the long stillness. At last Mrs. Herriot spoke. The perfect self-possession of her quiet voice fell on the flame of his turbulent emotions like cold water.

‘I think, my dear boy, I must ask you to return to your seat. I shall then be able to answer you more comfortably.’

To his own immense astonishment, Dick instantly obeyed. She knew Dick’s eyes now were on her face. She felt his gaze search and sear her. It held a strange burning question and set her heart beating quicker. There was a dread of something in Dick that was an unknown quantity which accounted for the restless strain she had felt in him recently.

‘I must give you time, dear boy, to return to your senses.’

Her voice was gravely gentle.

‘You sent me back to my seat, Mrs. Herriot, which perhaps I had no business to leave, but I cannot go back to my senses as I haven’t left them.’

He leaned forward, both hands outstretched and spoke with quiet insistence.

‘I offer you, for just so long as you need it, all the best of my time and skill. Also my life’s loyal devotion. When I beg you to marry me, I only mean, give me the right to be under the same roof within calling distance. I’m offering you a thing you require, a thing you need. Do you realise you are now my most precious possession and I want above all to prolong it’s life.’

‘And, why do you offer me all this?’

The Little White Lady’s quiet voice trembled.

‘Because I love you.’ said Dick Cameron simply. Once again complete silence fell. And again the ticking clock grew louder.

‘My dear boy, you amaze me.’ said Mrs. Herriot at last. ‘Now that I really grasp your meaning I am touched beyond words at this expression of your devotion to me. You must forgive me if I say at once that of course I could not think of taking advantage of your proposal. I could not dream of taking up such a generous impulse. But I am infinitely touched and very sincerely grateful. In my long life, more than twice your span - I have been courted

many times and twice won. But nothing so beautiful as this has happened to me. However, after tonight we will not speak of it again, ever. But you may always know you have given me a gift I shall treasure.'

She paused and Dick was not sure he wanted to be called dear boy again. 'It is a gift I shall hold as a treasure and cherish it in my memory But locked away like a diamond star or a string of pearls.'

She ceased speaking for a moment and wept softly. Then she said 'One day, when time has ceased for me. When past and future are merged, your dear mother and sometime wife will greet me with smiling faces in the great present of Eternity. They will have no regrets that their Dick's generous heart once did this for his Little White Lady.'

Dick's throat was dry. He leaned forward. 'I have no mother and I want no wife. I want only you. Please don't refuse me. Don't let conventions count. You have no-one to consult, I have no-one. I did not know how much I cared until I saw another man touch and trouble you and call you our patient as if we shared you. But you know how it grieves me to leave the house at night. I should treat you exactly the same, with the same respect I should treat my mother, but I would just be at hand if you sent for me. Will you think about it? Will you give it a week, then tell me your answer?'

1

'My dear young doctor, I cannot imagine any other answer than a very grateful No, but I'll give it to you in a week, if that is what you would like. Because of your marvellous generosity I will humour you in that. Now, bid your old friend goodnight, dear boy, and go.'

Dick stood up and stood for a moment looking down at her. He was himself again, confident and assured. Given the week he had asked, had restored his confidence in his own powers. She dismissed him with a little wave of her hand. He went gladly because he knew he had said all he wanted to.

Just for a moment he waited by the door. She wondered what more was coming then remembered. She lifted her hand and with a quick flash of diamonds, said 'God's blessing go with you, dear boy,' and he went out smiling, leaving his Little White Lady to meditate.

She sat very still in the silence as one who dreamed. It was very lovely to be cared for, for herself alone. Not for one moment did she contemplate the possibility of accepting his offer. But his brave young love had, she knew of a surety, been poured out at her feet. It was simple, honest, undisturbed by passion and self-seeking. She understood and she was touched. The fact that she was old, frail and worn, only made it more wonderful that she should be cared for and considered like this. She sat on, remembering and brooding.

She had been reading the book of Isaiah and thought of the whirlwind spoken of as having just left the room. He had whirled her nearly off her feet. And then like an earthquake, wrought an upheaval which stirred her to the depth. She drew the lamp nearer and the same passage caught her eye 'and after the earthquake, a fire, And after the fire, a still, small voice.' The Little White Lady's hand still trembled from happiness - 'And after the fire a still, small voice,' 'Speak, then, Lord, Your servant hears,' she murmured.

Then she looked up and saw beneath the chair where Dick had been sitting, a folded sheet of white paper, lying on the floor. It must have fallen out of his pocket book or was it one of the prescriptions given to him by Sir James. In his concentration on her and fervent talk, Dick had not noticed it. One glance and Mrs. Herriot knew the entire contents from the heading - 'Notes of the Herriot Will - Clause V, Concerning conditions of re-marriage.'

There followed a very business-like and accurate account of the will of Alexander Herriot.

Those frail hands trembled no longer. They were clasped in absolute stillness on Dick's folded notes.

'Oh, poor boy,' she whispered, 'poor boy. How best can I help him? However can this be made to work out for his eternal good?'

She pondered silently with no time to think of her own pain. Besides, hers was pain, just a thing to be borne, she realised.

Dick's was pain and wrong and needed setting right. Long consideration was impossible. Ellen would be in with her hot milk. It was essential that Dick should not know she had seen it but it was far too important a factor in

her future, and Dick's, to destroy, so she slipped it into her Bible at the 139th Psalm.

Then she began to read her normal psalm for that night.

Ellen walked in silence to the table.

'Ellen?'

'Yes, Ma'am?'

'Would you burn the few pieces of waste paper in the basket for me? And if the doctor returns and grows anxious because he thinks I sit up late, please reassure him.'

Ellen always did as she was asked without question however strange the request and did so this time. Then she went out quietly and closed the door. Mrs. Herriot returned quietly also to reading her psalm. It happened to be the fifty-fifth. She paused at the twelfth verse, reading it, then the two following verses, very slowly.

'For it is not an open enemy, that has done me this dishonour,' she read, reading it again aloud, 'for then could I have borne it . . . Neither was it my adversary that magnified himself against me then I would have hid myself from him. But it was thou, my companion, my guide and my own familiar friend.' The room was very still. The chastened look of suffering on the Little White Lady's face was sad to see.

She vaguely heard Ellen speak to an agitated doctor downstairs and then heard him laugh and depart a few minutes later.

'Did the doctor ask whether I needed him, Ellen?' she said, as they walked to her bedroom.

'Yes, Ma'am, I told him you were intent on the scriptures. I had tidied the room and burnt the rubbish as she told me to and the scraps of paper lying on the floor as I always pops into the fire.'

'What did the doctor say to that, Ellen?'

'He said he had lost some prescriptions but it didn't matter as he had finished with them and they were nasty things for you to find lying about and might worry you.'

'Worry me, Ellen?'

'Well, you see, Ma'am, he was wanting to be sure you would be forgiving him for rubbishing up the floor for you. And, ' Ellen was not quite sure she remembered the exact words. 'And he said he had come back incase he had

said anything that was startling or perhaps, distasteful to you Ma'am.' 'If he did, Ellen, I forgive him freely.'

'He was unusually quiet tonight, Mrs. Herriot, Ma'am, and he told me to be sure not to mention he had been but to get you quickly to bed.'

Mrs. Herriot smiled at last.

'I see, Ellen. Well, we better obey his second order and I better get to bed quickly and without any further delay.'

Mrs. Herriot had told Dick not to come to her again for the week but at one o'clock the next morning, his night-bell rang and there was a taxi waiting at his door.

During the long hours that followed, Dick feared that his Little White Lady was about to spread her silver wings and fly away.

He bitterly reproached himself with being the cause of the over-excitement which had brought on the attack. Had he been less impetuous, had he worked up more carefully and gently to that which he had to say, it would not have reacted with so much severity on her nervous system; she might have been spared this agony of suffering.

Dick cursed himself for a fool and watched beside her with great tenderness. He left nothing untried which might relieve her distress and increase his power to hold her in life.

During the long hours of the night he was perplexed by the look of agonised anxiety which she turned on the little table and the Bible by her bedside. He picked up the book and said, 'Would you like me to read you a psalm?' It was years since he had held a Bible in his hands. He couldn't quite hear himself reading a psalm but he would do that or anything else to remove her look of distress.

He caught sight of the marker at Psalm 55 and the words, 'Oh, that I had wings like a dove; for then would I fly away and be at rest.'

'Don't fly away just yet, my Little White Lady,' he said, gently, 'I need you here.' 'I know,' she whispered from blue lips, 'But, lock the Bible . . . away.'

He got up immediately, he was obviously making things worse instead of better by holding it. He then deposited the cherished Bible safely, locked the drawer of the mahogany chest and brought her the key. 'There, you saw me lock it up,' he said, 'Here's the key.' He slipped it under her pillow.

She closed her eyes quite restfully and before long, to his immense relief, she slept.

'Well,' he thought, 'why on earth did I have to lock it away before she would rest completely when she has already bound me to a sacred and tiresome promise to read a chapter a day. I could have started.'

By and by, when she was better and able to be downstairs again, and he had the triumphant pleasure of seeing her sitting on the sofa, behind the low table, with her Bible close at hand, in the halo of golden light cast by the shaded lamp. His sweet Little White Lady, just her old self again only a little older, a little frailer, a little more ethereal, he wondered once, 'Why did I have to lock it away when it might have helped, then?'

But he never spoke to her of it.

He would as soon have thought of mentioning the mysterious drawer where he had caught sight of silk stockings, gauzy things and lavender ribbons. These mysteries had come in the middle of the night when he had been alone with her, when she so nearly folded her wings and left him.

'It's no business of mine to question why,' thought Dick.

So Mrs. Herriot lived to read her psalm again each evening and presently she felt well enough to have Dick to dinner and to tell him her life story. She felt now that it was time she did.

It was exactly three weeks after the day of the consultation.

Chapter 13.

‘Sit there,’ said Mrs. Herriot, ‘in your usual chair. Make yourself very comfortable, Dick, because we are going to have a long, quiet talk. I want to tell you my story from the beginning.’

‘I’m here,’ said Dick, ‘I’m close, I’m listening.’ He lay back in the large armchair with his hands behind his head, fixing his dark eyes, earnest with attention, on Mrs. Herriot. She looked very calm and sweet and drew a soft shawl of purest white cashmere over her evening dress and around her shoulders with a graceful movement. She made the art of wearing a shawl something he cherished and gave him delight to watch. He was thinking that however mild and uneventful her story would be it would be relieved of monotony by her gentle humour and sometimes wit, and anyway he enjoyed watching her pretty hands and the up-and-down lilt of her soft, musical voice. Mrs. Herriot, at the same time, was wondering if she could really tell him everything or would it startle or shock him too much. Then she met his eyes with her own clear, penetrating look and they both smiled. It was one of the long, silent smiles which had so early become a habit of their friendship. They never spoilt it by hurrying it away in speech.

Then she began to speak, slowly and carefully, as if drawing up facts from a deep well of experience and memory.

‘The tragedy of life, my dear young doctor, for me personally, arose from the fact that I always wanted to be loved for myself alone.’ She paused and Dick stirred in his chair.

‘Well, I should think you always had your wish,’ he said. ‘Everybody who knew you would have loved you and everybody who loved you would love you for yourself alone.’

Her quiet eyes searched his face. Dick’s fell before them.

‘I have never been loved for myself alone,’ said the Little White Lady.

‘Now just listen and don’t feel obliged to speak.’

They had dined early and the fire had been lit. Mrs. Herriot felt the need of extra warmth in the evenings as the lovely autumn days drew to a close.

Twilight came slowly on this particular night and as she paused, Dick rose and crossed to the long window to draw the curtains. He gazed outside for a moment and wondered. Was there a moral to all this?

Why did his Little White Lady need to tell him things which might cause her pain in the remembering. That it all held a moral, no doubt. He wanted to give her that few moments pause but why did the atmosphere seem charged with such a dramatic sense of future tragedy. However, he would be patient. Her story held no perils for him. Great truths which might have called a halt to his ambitious spirit were not really alive. No more alive than a stained glass window, he suddenly thought; of less value than fragments of broken glass on the church ground. Yet there had been a time when he had prayed each morning, encircled by his mother's tender arms as she had tried to teach him some gentle ethical realities.

'Take me by the hand and lead me,
In the way I ought to go;
You can make me good and happy,
Only You can make me so.' He remembered.

'Bother the moral, if there is one,' thought Dick.

As she told him of her early years in Devon, in a little cottage banked by primroses and surrounded by apple blossom, a peaceful and fragrant childhood emerged with only occasional visits to cousins in London and a great, gloomy house in Portman Square, Dick was tempted to make several remarks and comments but he made none and remained silent as he had been asked.

He took his seat again and returned to the soft circle of light cast by the Little White Lady's reading lamp after he felt the need a second time to gaze at the London traffic for a few moments.

This time Mrs. Herriot slipped a folded sheet of paper at which she had been looking back into her Bible.

She smiled at Dick, drew her shawl more closely around her and went on with her story.

'I was nineteen when my father died, very shy and simple. I was deeply versed in all the poets and philosophers my father and I had read together but wholly ignorant of modern life and the ways of the world.

Our principal means of support, my father's pension, ceased with his life and it was with great misgivings I learned that my father's cousin, Constance, in London, was to be my guardian. She informed me abruptly but not without some kindness that I would now live in the cold, uninviting house with herself and her brother, Alexander, and become her companion and secretary - unpaid of course. The little cottage would be sold to pay our debts.

'It was,' said Mrs. Herriot, 'a terrible contrast. I need not weary you with the trials of that time. After a year, though, I became conscious of the gratifying little attentions of my cousin's brother, Alexander, who eventually offered me an escape back to Devon if I became his wife. He was quite kind at the time but the trip to Devon was a very temporary affair and he very soon longed to return to the gloomy house and the life of London society. I was grateful to him so I obeyed and it did not for a moment occur to me to refuse, either to go or to return. I knew nothing of love or married life. They were not happy years, Dick, my cousin soon wearied of me. Up to a point, he was loyal but he was the kind of man whose affection soon turns to irritation and contempt by the very fact of being tied to marriage. It was the long line of the name of Herriot he wanted to continue.

A little son was born, the much desired heir to the Herriot name and fortune, but he was a weak and trembling baby who died in my arms when only a few days old. I was never given another.' There was a long pause. Dick felt he understood and waited.

'I found myself more and more left on one side and ignored. The tie between brother and sister grew to a closer intimacy of dependence when, after six more years, my husband developed symptoms of the deadly disease of tuberculosis. So little can be done even now and in those days practically nothing was attempted save fresh air and extra nourishment. But from the first there was no hope and he lingered through many weary months of suffering. Their only relief seemed to be a continual argument about the matter of my remarriage.

My cousin did not think I should ever have the courage to re-marry but my husband thought only of his control over me after his death. So when my husband's will was read, it was discovered that his capital would be left to me if my future husband would take the name of Herriot. Otherwise, as a widow, I would receive an allowance upon which to live.'

Mrs. Herriot paused again then and looked at Dick.

‘Am I making things clear, my young doctor? I want you to understand it all completely.’

‘I quite understand,’ said Dick. ‘You have made it all clear. Don’t like it but evidently the will was made to fulfil a definite purpose that the name Herriot would live on.’

‘Constance was furious, of course,’ Mrs. Herriot continued. ‘She contested the will in court but it was upheld. I tell you this because of all that followed. I found myself in possession of a fortune but my comfort and peace were disturbed by the fact that as a widow it could not be used. So then Alexander’s widow became a highly desirable wife for all sorts and conditions of men only too eager it seemed to change their name immediately. I grew to have a morbid dread of every new visitor to the house. Poor Alexander wished to hold a dead hand over the living but he had failed to recognise in me a strength of character which suffering had developed or that my life with him had given a passionate desire to be loved, someday, for myself alone.’

The allowance was actually very substantial so after two years I escaped once again from London and bought a little cottage in Devon where I had spent such happy years with my father. I’m afraid I never knew my mother, she died when I was born.

‘And now,’ said Mrs. Herriot, ‘let me continue to keep from all unnecessary details and go straight to the main issues.’

‘I could come back tomorrow evening, if you like and as many more as necessary,’ said Dick.

She turned to him, smiling gently. Her face was white and tired but filled with a quiet peace.

‘I think the relief of telling you is greater than the strain. Also, I have an object in telling you my story and when it is accomplished I shall find great peace of mind, I know.’

‘Hmm, there’s a moral;’ mused Dick to himself. ‘I thought so.’ Aloud, he said, ‘Very well, only don’t tax yourself too heavily.’

He had risen once more to move aside the curtain and watch the London evening traffic passing beneath him. Swiftly moving cars dashed by and taxis and an occasional klip-klop of horses’ hoofs. The twentieth century

was there all right. It was a relief to verify it, he thought. Thirty-five years had elapsed in the telling of Mrs. Herriot's story.

Dick felt thankful his Little White Lady could not know her story was putting him through more anguish than he had realized it would. He came back to her and sat down, although he also laid his fingers on her wrist.

'Now,' she said, after laying back with her eyes closed for a moment, 'I must finish. I will take you to the early summer evenings when I took my walks down the Devonshire lanes. I constantly went out by myself and the complete solitude refreshed my weary spirit. Then, it seemed very suddenly, I was made aware of a strikingly handsome man who rode the lanes occasionally on horseback. He gave me courteous but impersonal attention for some time and I learned that he stayed in an inn nearby. Then one day, he lifted his hat, gave me his card with a respectable town club address and we became acquainted. It all began to belong to another world and stirred me with sensations hitherto unknown in my sheltered, ordered life.

One day he lingered at my garden gate and left his hand over both mine when we parted. From then on we walked the lanes together in the evening sunsets. It all gave me exciting days and wakeful nights with a curious thrill of joy. I seemed to have entered a new heaven and a new earth where there dwelt something called romance.

To cut a long story short, Dick, love, deep, passionate love had come my way at last, and at the end of ten days I was engaged to be married. I did not fear to let the love grow because here was a man who knew nothing of the Herriot will.

We had a long talk and I explained the contents of my husband's will and he took it very simply. 'I have no objection to taking the name,' he said, 'It is a good name and as long as I get you with the name, I certainly shall not complain.'

'So, at last, I was loved for myself alone. Before pledging myself finally, I asked him whether we should be of one mind concerning those divine things which meant most in life to me. I told him frankly of my love for the Bible, my father's Bible, of how I never went to rest without reading a Psalm and of how crushed and lonely I had felt during

my first marriage because the things most precious to me had meant nothing to Alexander Herriot.

He looked at me honestly.

'Dear,' he said, 'I am something of a black sheep, I'm afraid. But I had a pious old mother. Her prayers have followed me through all my wanderings. At last they have guided me to you. You will win me back into the old paths, never fear.'

So I rested content. We returned to town, saw my lawyers, settled all business matters and fixed our wedding day. My cousin, Constance was abroad which saved a lot of trouble and explaining but suddenly, Alec insisted on our marriage being brought forward a week - his name was the same as my husband's but he said I should call him Alec to save any unhappy memories - he gave me no reason except to say he could not wait and to a woman who loved him that was reason enough.

He had planned that we should go abroad and travel for several months. He wished to show me Norway and Switzerland in the summer and Italy and the Riviera later on. I had never travelled and it was marvellous dream to be taken to all these places by Alec. They were places I had visited in books and never seen.

On our wedding day we were to go to a charming riverside hotel on the Thames not very far from town. He would not tell me where it was but said it would be a perfect hideaway for us. This did not worry me as I was living in a dream-world of my own and nothing seemed to matter. I knew I could get in touch with people as soon as returned and I longed to be away with my handsome rider from the Devonshire lanes.

I had an indefinable sense that he was not altogether at ease in my particular crowd of friends.

He captivated most of the women but he avoided the men and as the days went by, began to make various excuses for coming to see me, only when he would be likely to find me alone.

The evening before my wedding day I had an unpleasant shock. A friend of mine, whose gladness in my joy had been very warm and genuine, wrote to tell me that her husband had just discovered that Alec was not known at the club, the address of which was printed on the card he had given me. She

also, very tactfully wanted to know how much I knew of his relatives and background. Her letter begged me to postpone my marriage until I had made a few inquiries concerning my lover's family and previous history.

'An old family from Scotland, of which most of the members appear to be dead, is very vague,' she wrote, 'and the one fact which could be investigated turns out to be inaccurate. Dear Helen, let an old friend implore you not to make the fatal mistake of trusting yourself and your future, for life, to a possible adventurer.'

I burnt the letter with indignation. Nothing would have induced me to inquire privately into any statement of Alec's. But even though I destroyed it and loyally dismissed it from my mind, the letter cast a shadow over my joy. I couldn't show it to Alec. He would have laughed it off. As it was I seemed to have lost the magic of some sweet spell which had been cast over me since he had first laid his hands on mine and comforted me in the Devonshire lanes. However, no such fantasy dreams troubled my friend.'

'Was it Lady Airth?' came Dick's troubled voice.

'Yes,' said Mrs. Herriot, simply, 'she was, and is, a true friend.'

'Hmm,' Dick said under his breath. If his Little White Lady heard, she ignored him.

She wanted, above all, to finish her story.

'I have never been really strong or capable of much strain or exertion, so I suppose I chose also to do nothing that might trouble me. She and the Earl spent twenty four hours following up every lead with their many connections and friends and found to their horror the man who called himself Alec Ross to me, had many other aliases and was already married.

'Cad,' cried Dick, 'how could he, I'd hang him.' His impetuous young voice fell silent. He was overwhelmed by his own emotions and got up and once again strode to the windows. 'Hush, dear boy, I've nearly finished.' The Little White Lady wept softly and her weeping brought some relief.

Presently Dick came back and this time knelt beside her. 'My courage failed, I'm afraid,' she said, 'I couldn't bear to hear anything else at that time, although later they let me know more of the details of Alec's wild life. He had quite a career of crime, blackmail, dishonourable treatment of other women and a sick wife who subsequently died heartbroken. He was put in prison, of course, and I was advised never to see him again. He had made

himself well acquainted in London with the contents of the Herriot will before he came specifically to find me in Devon. Influential friends of my cousin came to my aid as well as the friend whose warning I had ignored but the shock was so great and so sudden that I spent some time under the care of Sir Deryck Brand.'

This was too much for Dick. He knew Sir Deryck and his work with those who were seriously overwrought. His heart smote him. He took her hands in his but remained kneeling.

'I cannot, truly, my Little White Lady, I cannot allow you to talk any longer. Let me ring for Ellen,' he said, tenderly. 'To think that you - you of all people - should have sustained all this ghastly tragedy in life. And through it all, unlike so many others I know, you have contrived to keep an exquisite air of aloofness from all the sordidness and sin in life. Being in the centre of such a vile type of crooked dealing has still left you unsoiled, pure as a dove with silver wings.'

Dick felt eloquent and full of emotions he did not understand but he curbed his tongue for her sake and the lateness of the hour. He felt she was like an old-world and delicate piece of gossamer and was horrified that she should be treated so deceitfully just for someone else's gain.

She allowed him now all the time he wanted to speak.

'And yet,' he continued, 'I'm conscious that this tale of wrongs, far from lowering my ideals, has raised them. I suppose that if your own heart is true and your own mind is pure your spirit can walk on the mountain top, above all that is debased and sordid. In fact, your atmosphere is created, not by what has happened in your life, but by what you are.'

Suddenly Dick bent his head and kissed the hands he held, reverently and tenderly. He hated to think Alec Ross had ever held and kissed them. An immense pity for the little bride-to-be of thirty-five years ago was surging through Dick's manly heart. Her sorrows might have been yesterday. He looked up into her gentle eyes with fire in his own.

'I love you!' he said, 'I love you, just for yourself alone, just because you are you.'

She drew her right hand from his grasp and passed her fingers softly through his hair searching his face with a long, earnest gaze.

Dick's look did not falter before hers. His impulse at that moment was absolutely honest and genuine.

The Little White Lady smiled a very tender smile. Ellen came in with the usual hot milk and Dick insisted upon carrying his Little white Lady up the stairs to her room.

His arms were very strong and tender, he knew.

'Are my arms strong and tender?' he asked.

There was no answer.

His face was very close to hers as he put her down but kept his arms around her. 'Well, will you answer me this? Are you going to give me the right to care for you always?'

'Tomorrow evening I will finally answer that question. Now, good-night, Dick and do not expect to be called. I feel particularly well and not in the least bit tired. Ellen will show you your room for tonight.'

She passed in and closed the door.

Dick ran lightly down the stairs. The long strain was over. Carrying her upstairs had been a relief. The strain on his muscles had eased the tension of his mind. He wished she had been heavier and hoped his arms would haunt her with that sense of tenderness and strength.

Now he was very hungry and ready for the sandwiches and soda Ellen had thoughtfully left him.

'Was there ever such a blackguard?' he thought, 'as Alec Ross?'

In the silent, dimly lighted drawing-room, the shade of the Prophet Nathan, who had spoken to King David about his sin, waited silently.

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Chapter 14

The room was very quiet. In the silence Dick seemed still to hear the up and down lilt of his Little White Lady's voice. He thought of her preparing for

rest in the room overhead attended by that tall stalwart woman, Ellen Ransom. In his mind he still called her Maher-hal-al-hashbaz. It amused him to think of remembered things from the Bible. He thought of the contrast of the sturdy, tall woman and the frailty of the Little White Lady. Although so fragile she had loved, to the fullest measure of her capacity, the handsome scoundrel who played with women's hearts as lightly as you might fling dice. What a beast! Great heavens!! What a beast of a man.

The shade of the Prophet Nathan drew nearer.

If Alec Ross wanted money, being utterly unscrupulous, he could have turned forger, or card sharper, or used any other villainous way of making money. Why did he have to choose to trample on women's hearts? And he could have chosen someone else, rather than the poor, unawakened, trembling heart of the Little White Lady. She who only asked to walk in solitude at sunset, where thrushes sang in the hawthorn, lambs gambolled in the meadows, wild roses clustered in the hedge. As in the case of King David of old, Dick's anger was greatly kindled against the man.

'He deserved to die,' thought Dick 'He ought to be shot. But shooting is too good for him, the cold-blooded scoundrel. The way he plotted and planned to get hold of her money. Actually going to Somerset House and reading her husband's will.'

The shade of the Prophet Nathan lifted an accusing finger.

The silent words from the Bible account rang in Dick's mind at last - - -
'Thou art the man.'

Dick Cameron dropped his head in his hands. 'Oh, no' said his accusing conscience, 'It's me. But that man was an adventurer, a cad, he didn't know her. He had done nothing for her. I know her well. I know all her gentle sweetness and . . . And she has done so much for me. And she trusted me. But I won her trust.'

The clock ticked, it seemed louder to Dick.

'Traitor! Traitor! Traitor! It was increasingly louder than he could bear. 'She gave me her sweet friendship. She took me to her heart. She treated me like a son and made me welcome in her home and I'm a, I'm a traitor.'

Dick lifted a haggard face.

'But she doesn't know. No harm is done. Thank God she doesn't know. Tomorrow, she will refuse my offer of marriage. That will wipe out the wrong and I can start in again loving her for herself alone. I can keep her trust right to the end.'

The end. The end. The end. The clock ticked out the merciless pendulum. 'The end,' thought Dick. 'It will be the end of all my plans. Then nobody will know about all my hopes and dreams. I shall have to drudge on with the hateful round, being at the beck and call of every child who needs a pill, every silly woman who wants somebody's attention on the mind and body. Wasting my best years scraping together the capital to start my theories working.'

He gazed before him moodily.

And such men as Alec Ross would gamble thousands away for their own selfish pleasure. I want it for the good of humanity. His eye fell upon the empty sofa and the lamp left solitary on the table.

'Well,' he said, again. She doesn't know, so no harm's done. The door opened and Ellen Ransome came in. Dick did not stir. Ellen gave him the creeps tonight. 'Your room is ready, sir,' she said. 'Thank you,' said Dick. He didn't move or look up at her. He ignored her for as long as he could but she still didn't move. He felt her green eyes upon him. 'Well, Ellen' he said, eventually, 'do you intend to put me to bed as well?'

Ellen stood her ground without smiling.

'I want your advice, sir.'

'What's the trouble?' Heart, liver, stomach?'

'I'm a respectable woman, Dr. Cameron and I know better than to mention such things.'

'Even respectable women occasionally have indigestion and I've even know a titled lady with a liver.' He waited.

'What is it, then?'

'It's my conscience, sir,' she said, with dignity.

Dick laughed without much joy.

'Well, forget it and cast it away,' said Dick, shortly.

'I can't, it is about my lady upstairs.'

Dick sat up and looked at her, instantly attentive.

'Well, what is the trouble, Ellen?'

‘Many years ago, sir, I told my lady a lie.’

‘And why did you do that?’

‘It was to make her happy at the time.’

‘Well then, stick to the lie, if the truth would make her unhappy.’

‘But when she looks at me so clear and believing, the lie comes back and I know I’ll have no rest until I tell her the truth. It troubles my conscience.’

‘Bother your conscience, Ellen, if I told her fifty lies to make her happy I’d stick to every one of them.’

‘Fifty lies might not be so bad as one,’ said Ellen shrewdly.

‘Well, out with it!’ cried Dick. ‘When I know what it is I’ll advise you.’

As he looked at Ellen, he felt a cold shiver. What had he let himself in for?

‘Some time ago I told her the doctor had said she would live a long time . .

But he didn’t say that at all. Do you think I ought to tell her now? Now that she is not getting better, I mean, you would know, sir.’

Dick stood to his feet. His overwrought nerves could bear no more but he felt a slight relief. This was something he could take care of.

‘If you told her that, don’t regret it now. Confound your conscience, Ellen. What do our worries matter compared with causing her one moment of fresh sadness. You lessened her grief and pain then and I forbid you to mention the subject to her now.’

Ellen Ransome’s mournful face brightened.

Nothing pleased her so much as when the doctor did what she called, ‘let fly.’ ‘Very well, sir,’ she said. ‘I’ll be guided by you. I only want to do what is right by my lady. As you say, my own peace of mind doesn’t matter.

‘You’re a good soul, Ellen’ said Dick, opening the door for her.

Goodnight. Call me immediately if she seems unwell.’

Dick shivered as he went to his room.

‘Oh, my poor Little White Lady!’ he thought. ‘We deceive her right and left. But she has enough to bear without sharing the burden of our sins.’

He paused on his way, outside her room. All was quiet within. He felt certain she slept. Had she been lulled to rest by the remembrance that his arms had been strong and tender?

He felt his own self esteem returning gradually. A wrong which is unconfessed and undiscovered is very quickly condoned and forgotten by the wrongdoer.

It was a great saving of anxiety on his part to be sleeping in the house. The bed Ellen had prepared was a luxury of comfort calculated to send the most restless mind to sleep. He was dreaming in two minutes of bungalows on Dinglevale Common .

His Little White Lady was young and active and installed as Matron. He was not sure whether he had married her or not. Ellen was gardening vaguely in the distance and Margaret was one of the patients but she turned out to be the Large Lady of the Manor. The shock woke him up, shouting, 'Margaret!' Then he remembered he thought Ellen was in trousers and the thought made him laugh. He turned over and fell into a deep and dreamless slumber.

Before starting on his rounds the next morning, Dick paid Mrs. Herriot a professional visit. He did not mention all that had been said the night before and made no reference to the evening to come when she would give him her answer to his proposal.

His manner was grave and very professional. He found her well and very rested and with a pulse strong and steady. He rose to take his leave quite soon but she detained him, searching his face.

'Will you tell me again, my dear young doctor,' she said, gently, exactly what Sir James Montford said about the possible length of my life?'

'He said another two to three years, Mrs. Herriot, with great care, possibly more.'

'But,. you did not agree'

'No, I did not agree with him.'

'How long do you give me, Dick?'

'I told you on the day he came, Mrs. Herriot. It entirely depends on the care I can give you and I am going to take such care that it will mean twenty years.'

'Then you give me twenty years? In that case I shall live to be a very old woman.'

Dick disregarded her smiling remark.

'You will never be old to me' he said, 'you have a young soul. I never think of you as old. You are one of life's evergreens.'

'Well, I am going to talk to you tonight, Dick in a very elderly way, very, very elderly, Dick.'

He coloured painfully.

'Mrs. Herriot, wouldn't you rather forget about all that. I realize I have been extremely presumptuous. I feel ashamed that you should even be troubled to say no to my request.'

'It certainly isn't a trouble, Dick. It may have problems and complications but no woman who has a proposal of marriage could call the answer a trouble. However old she may be. It is a thrilling, humbling experience that a man should choose her and want her and desire to lay down a life's devotion at her feet. Whatever my answer will be it will certainly be full of gratitude.

Now, dear boy, don't let me keep you.

Come tonight and shall think of you all day, caring for all the patients who wait for your visit.'

When Dick had gone, Mrs. Herriot rang her bell.

'Ellen,' she said, 'the doctor has given me a good report today. I'm going to rise at once and go for a short drive before lunch. Would you be good enough to ask for the carriage for me.' While Ellen went downstairs, Mrs. Herriot lay quite still, her mind concentrating on the step she contemplated. It required a good deal of tact and outwitting diplomacy. It was essential she should know something definitely. Without that certainty she could not come to her decision where Dick was concerned.

Soon after a short drive she was handing in her card to Sir Montford's pompous butler with the gentle, confiding smile which usually gained for her whatever she wanted.

'Sir James will understand I am not able to wait long but I will only want a few minutes of his valuable time.'

As she sat in the waiting room her mind followed her young doctor, wasting precious time going from house to house in tedious visits. When would he have the position to sit in his own consulting room, ready to give all who came to him his undivided and instant attention? She felt almost as anxious concerning the ultimate attaining of Dick's top-of-the-tree vision as did Dick Cameron himself.

The door opened and she was asked to step this way.

'How kind of you, Sir James, to see me so promptly.'

The great man seized her hand which seemed lost in his large clasp and waived her to a chair.

‘Delighted, my dear Mrs. Herriot. I only hope your desire to see me does not mean a return of any distressing symptoms. I feel I have said all that was needed when I visited, however, if there are any other questions or if you would like me to examine you once again.’

Sir James fingered the gold charm on his watch-chain with the restless movement she remembered and studied her card with attention as though it would help him understand the reason for her visit.

‘I am perfectly well, sir James, in fact I feel better than when you saw me but I felt I would like to have a few words with you in private.’

Sir James revolved in his chair and studied the calm face. Its frail delicacy was obvious but its expression was gentle and peaceful. ‘Certainly, Mrs. Herriot, certainly.’

‘Circumstances have arisen, Sir James, which make it absolutely imperative that I should have a definite idea as to how long - humanly speaking - I am likely to live. I know you told me there was no reason I should not, with care, live for years but I am well aware that sometimes a consultant cannot tell the patient all the facts and how they understand things. May I now beg you to tell me your real opinion of the matter.’

Sir James spread out his hands and expanded into a smile of extreme sincerity and candour.

‘My dear lady,’ he said, ‘I gave you at the time an honest judgement, as far as it was possible to form. Even if I were to examine you again, it would not alter my verdict. I remember I said two years, possibly three with great care, perhaps more.’

‘Is that what you told my own doctor?’

‘I said to Cameron exactly what I am now repeating to you.’

‘But, he did not agree with you?’ suggested Mrs. Herriot softly. Sir James again sought the comfort of the charm on his watch-chain.

‘No,’ he said, testily. ‘Young men are apt to be very tenacious with their own opinions. He was unwilling to accept a more mature judgement. But it was quite unnecessary to worry you with a difference of opinion.’

‘Sir James,’ and Mrs. Herriot’s voice was even quieter than before, ‘in response to a very earnest appeal on my part, Dr. Cameron told me this morning how long he gives me. It is because I could not quite believe him,

and it is essential I should not make any mistakes, that I have come directly to you, unknown to him.'

Sir James bounded out of his chair.

'It is unforgivable. Absolutely unwarranted. Even if I had agreed with him, no doctor - except in very unusual circumstances has any right to tell a patient she can only live six or seven months. Such a statement can only hasten the disaster. It is really unforgivable. You were quite right to come to me, Mrs. Herriot. I don't wonder you felt disturbed. I beg you to dismiss his unnecessary statement from your mind and take comfort from my more hopeful view.'

The colour had faded from Mrs. Herriot's face but a look of triumphant peace lent it a certain radiance which illumined the extreme pallor.

'So my young doctor told you at the consultation, Sir James, that in his opinion I could not live longer than six or seven months?'

'He did, my dear madam. That he should have given you such a hopeless diagnosis instead of the encouragement of mine, in such an important case, shows he really needs a great deal more expertise. I shall tell him so at the first opportunity. Meanwhile, my dear Mrs. Herriot,'

'Meanwhile, Sir James,' said the Little White Lady, rising with a sweetly radiant smile and illuminating the gloomy consulting room, 'meanwhile, I must not take up any more of your valuable time and I beg you not to mention to Dr. Cameron that I have been. It would greatly disturb him to discover I now know his true opinion. You see, this morning he told me that with the care he would give me I should probably live for another twenty years.'

Mrs. Herriot laid her two guineas on the table and departed.

She chose not to notice Sir James with his quick intake of breath and sudden look of heightened blood pressure and extreme embarrassment.

Chapter 15.

Dick entered the drawing-room, saw Mrs. Herriot seated in her usual chair behind the little table and felt like a schoolboy summoned into the presence of

the Head Master. A schoolboy who knew he was to receive a reprimand but thankful that the full extent of his errors was not actually known.

The previous night he had lived through the happenings of thirty-five years ago and had seemed to be carrying the shrinking little bride up the stairs. So eager was his desire to comfort and protect her and to succeed where other men had failed, it had seemed quiet natural to stand with his arms still wrapped about her and put his question once again.

But now, in her calm grace and dignity, she was very much Mrs. Herriot of Park Lane. Her silvery hair mildly rebuked his youthfulness. Her supposed need of him did not seem to justify the magnitude of the proposal he had made. She greeted him in silence, putting her hand in his with a smile which seemed to search his soul and although silence was often her way of saying so much, tonight it greatly disturbed him.

He was confused and expressed his troubled soul in nervous speech. 'Shall we play chess, tonight? It's so long since we had a game. Perhaps I shall win at last. I always think I might until you beat me and even then I think, well, perhaps next time - even in Elba, Napoleon scanned the horizon.'

He was not sure why he had said that and didn't quite know how to continue. 'No, not chess tonight, Dick,' she said. 'I've kept you waiting so long, I have an explanation to give you and a decision to make. Lean back in your chair, dear boy, and on no account interrupt me! I must speak honestly and clearly. Three weeks ago you took me greatly by surprise by suddenly asking me to marry you. Any woman would have been amazed and I especially, as it came from someone whom I had come to regard almost as a son. But your reasons were from an unselfish devotion, I know.' Mrs. Herriot pause.

The lamp flicked. Bending forward she carefully adjusted it. But Dick kept his mouth firmly shut. The least he could do was to listen and regard her request not to interrupt. It also delivered him from having to speak when he hadn't the faintest idea what to say. Mrs. Herriot drew her soft shawl more closely around her and resumed her explanation.

'When a woman receives an offer of marriage, her first thought is of

Herself. Any woman would say the same. What will people say? What will my friends think of me? Do I love him? Does he love me? Will I be happy? Or, as in our case, the actual romance side of it doesn't come in, for what reason does he want to marry me?

On that evening, my dear young doctor, I must admit my first thought was of myself. Although I was astonished and alarmed I hope I answered with some gratitude because I knew you felt you would be able to care for me better that way. But I still thought only of myself.

How unheard of a thing my friends would think. A nine days wonder to my little world, at my age, married again and to such a young man. It was all centred on myself. But afterwards, when you left, my whole point of view adjusted to putting myself in the background. That should always happen when important matters are at stake.

I suddenly realised all that I would mean to you. No, don't say anything yet, dear boy.

I had originally intended to adopt you as my son and to leave you well off so that you would be set free from the drudgery entailed in making a living. Then you would have ample time to spend to continue your studies and specialize in the chosen branch of your profession. Also you would have the money to launch your schemes for the betterment of so many poor people. This seemed to me to be a most noble way of using the Herriot money. But unfortunately, I possessed no control over the capital and have always spent my full income, having no-one else to consider. I would, of course, have arranged for an annuity for Ellen and substantial legacies for the rest of my household.

I hadn't told you then of Alexander Herriot's will but the terms absolutely prevented me from doing all that but,' she paused, 'I saw at once that to go through a ceremony of marriage with you - for of course that is all your proposal meant, would give me immediate right to bequeath the whole capital to whomever I wanted.

Instead of going into already over wealthy institutions, the Herriot money could, without defrauding anybody, be used in the wonderful way in which I know you would use it. The enormous gain for you would override the possible ridicule to which I should no doubt lay myself open.'

Mrs. Herriot paused again. This time, looking across at Dick, seeming now to allow or even invite some comment.

Twice Dick tried to speak but his mouth was dry and his throat seemed to contract. At length he said, 'You .. you put it all on the question of money. You don't seem to take into consideration my, er, what I,' He broke off. His eyes fell before the gentle inquiry of her look.

'My dear boy, I remember all you said, perfectly. All the lovely, tender things on that evening.

There was no mention of any special benefit for you or gain. But a woman of my age could never accept the thought of a sacrifice like that from a young man on the threshold of life just to look after and care for me, as the main issue involved. Much as it would have meant relief for my own comfort.'

'It would not have been a sacrifice,' said Dick huskily, misery in his eyes. 'It would have been a privilege.'

Mrs. Herriot ignored the interruption.

Dick dropped his head into his hands. His Little White Lady knew she must finish and she intended to put him through the test she knew she must do just now, before anything further could be said. 'Dick, day by day, during the past three weeks, I have been realising more and more clearly, the immense difference to your whole life, your future career, which would result from the possession of a fixed income and substantial capital. You have done so much for me that I feel I could bring myself to do this, even this, for you, if I were sure that I am not likely to live many months more. Sir James said two or three years. If that is so I could not possibly bring myself to tie your young manhood to a merely nominal marriage. It would be an intolerable burden for you.'

She waited.

She longed to put her arms round him and draw that troubled, haggard expression to her, tell him she knew all and had long ago forgiven. Then she could reinstate him on the path of honour. If Dick had raised his head, her impulsive tenderness would have done so but he didn't lift his head. Much had yet to be done before Dick would be ready to understand to the full, a love which knowing all, forgave all, causing even his wrong doing to work together for his eventual good.

Dick, little dreaming that he was being tested, groaned.

'Do you think it possible, Dick, that Sir James was wrong,' she said, fearlessly, 'and that I am not likely to live much longer than a few months.'

She watched him anxiously, as she put the question. She was putting Dick's devotion through a crucial moment.

Dick slowly lifted his head and looked into her eyes. She saw the haunted look of a soul in despair in those bright eyes, usually so gay and fearless.

'Sir James Montford is known to be one of the best authorities on heart problems in London,' he said. 'His words, repeated several times were exactly what I told you. For my part, as I have said before, if my care can do it, I shall keep you here as long as Sir James said and longer.'

His Little White Lady's eyes overflowed with thankful tears. She realized he would not now sacrifice her to gain his own ends. He would lose the advantage he had planned sooner than there be any risk of cost to herself. His plot of deception was heartless and his selfish ambition had led him astray. His passion for self-advancement had caused him to do her one grievous wrong but now his devotion had proved genuine. His tender care of her would not fail. The Little white Lady however wanted more. She was planning to be a living parable to her young doctor. He was the prodigal son, although he would have pushed aside the inspired story and mocked its content, yet she knew the heavenly Father's heart yearned over him. She longed to spare the wanderer pain but he had to reach a point of voluntary confession. She could not do it for him.

She waited, giving him time and opportunity but Dick said no more. She nerved herself for what must now be said.

'I saw another heart specialist, Dick, and I wont tell you who, but he said he does not think me likely to live longer than another six months.'

'Oh, no, dear,' cried Dick, hotly, sitting up, instantly alert and anxious, 'you should not really have done that, but all I can say is, it has no weight whatever. Dismiss it from your mind. You must. It is not to be trusted as a proper conclusion. It's wrong.'

'I think not, Dick. It is the opinion of a man I fully trust, whose answer carries more weight than that of Sir James. As this is so, it has helped me arrive at my decision.' Mrs. Herriot drew her Bible toward her, folded her hands and rested them on it as if the sense that all that was beneath them gave her the required strength for her next sentence. The diamonds glittered in the soft radiance of the lamplight. It was the wedding ring placed on her finger by Alexander Herriot more than forty years before.

Mrs. Herriot, herself, now faced ridicule, criticism and contempt if she went ahead at the point. The test was not only for Dick. But was this the reason for all those quiet years when faith and patience were being strengthened? Was the end of her life to be more fruitful than the beginning or intervening years had been.

Could she bear the excitement of a purposeful use of Alexander Ross's fortune however short a time?

Having now come this far, she had no intention, whatever the cost to herself, of turning back.

Dick's heart had stood still at the wonder, the supreme surprise and sense of responsibility of that which he suddenly realized Mrs. Herriot was about to say. She spoke very slowly and deliberately. There was an air of detachment about her. The world of change and sordid judgements and mixed motives had no part in this.

To Dick the soul of his Little White Lady seemed already about to spread its silver wings and leave him.

He listened as she spoke, awe and reverence in his eyes.

'For the sake of your future, my dearest boy, for the sake of your great work, for the sake of all that which I firmly believe you will eventually be and do for the glory of God and the good of mankind, I am willing to marry you as soon as the matter can be conveniently arranged. I love you as a mother might love a very dear son. I am trusting you as a very dear son should be trusted by his mother.'

Dick stood up. For a moment he was speechless but his eyes filled with unaccustomed tears. Then he knelt down beside her and placed his right hand over both hers as they lay folded on her Bible, thus covering the gleam of the precious stones and the uncontrollable trembling of those frail little hands.

He spoke with all the maturity of the grown man he was and with a deep humility.

'My Little white Lady,' he said, 'I will never fail your trust, so help me God.'

Chapter 16

They sat together, as they had so often sat before, in the quiet drawing-room of the house in Park Lane, Dick and his Little White Lady. They had just finished an absorbing game of chess, in which, as usual, she had beaten him.

Outwardly, there appeared to be no change in their relationship. Yet, on that afternoon, they had stood together in Marylebone Parish Church, in the presence of a few trusted friends. She had put her hand in his and had heard him promise, with a depth of fervent earnestness in his voice, to love and to cherish her, 'till death us do part.'

There was pathos on this occasion about that solemn sentence, known only in its full significance to the two who uttered it. They knew that unless death was going to part them, they would not be standing there to be united. All the necessary preliminaries had been easily and quickly arranged.

There was no need for Dick to take the Herriot name. All would soon be his. 'Shall you mind,' the Little White Lady had asked, rather wistfully, 'if I keep the name that all my friends call me, 'Mrs. Herriot?' I would find it difficult to change.'

'You will always be Mrs. Herriot to me,' Dick had answered, gently. 'Except for legal purposes I do not see why you should be troubled with any other name.'

He was anxious to make all as easy as possible for her.

As soon as the service was over, he had brought her back to her own home - now his also, and leaving her to rest undisturbed had gone off on his usual rounds.

Between tea and dinner, Mrs. Herriot's lawyer had waited upon her. Thus, the first time she signed her new name was in bequeathing the whole of her fortune, with the exception of legacies to her household, to Dick Cameron. When all formalities were completed and the will duly signed and witnessed, her mind was at rest.

So the evening of their wedding day found them quietly playing chess and if Dick's game was a little wilder than usual, Mrs. Herriot made no comment.

Dick conscientiously did his best with the game. At ten o'clock they packed away the chessmen and Dick lay back, his hands behind his head and let his eyes dwell tenderly upon the restful picture of his Little White Lady turning the leaves of her Bible, in the golden halo of her shaded lamp.

Presently she looked up and smiled. Dick returned the look. One of those long, understanding smiles, from the first a feature of their friendship, passed between them. In his button hole was the opening bud of a golden Rayon d'Or rose. It reminded her of the first thing she had said to him, 'What a perfectly lovely, golden rose.' And the constant delivery of such to the Dinglevale house since.

'Are you happy, dear boy?' she asked. 'Are you content?'

'Very happy. And very grateful to be so wonderfully trusted. I should be happier still if I did not feel unworthy of all this.'

She waited incase Dick felt he should continue along the theme of his unworthiness.

But there was no more. Her silence had given him an opportunity if he so desired but Dick went no further. Presently he pulled himself together with an effort. 'It is wonderful to me to sit here, knowing that I am at home. All my life long I have not had a home.'

'And during all those long years,' said the Little White Lady, 'my home has not had a master.'

Dick coloured. 'I'm not that,' he said.

'Dear boy, it is my wish that you should take your rightful place in our home. Are you pleased with your rooms?'

'I am indeed,' said Dick, warmly. 'The study was a great surprise, arranged so perfectly, with everything a man could possibly need. However did you know all I would like?'

'A little imagination is a useful thing,' she smiled, 'and proper imagination is essentially practical. It enables you to put yourself in someone else's place and realize exactly how people would feel when you may never have been there yourself. That is how many writers write, although wild tales mean that imagination has run riot and become out of control.'

'I see,' said Dick, 'well yours has been perfectly controlled and I shall spend many hours there. I have much to study and read before I can put some of my ideas to work. But there is time now.'

‘Yes,’ she said, softly, ‘there is time. You have all the best of life before you.’
‘I know,’ he said, ‘Yes, I know.’

They sat long in silence.

There was no need for hurry.

Dick broke the silence once.

‘It is so nice not to have to go, to turn out.’ She looked up and smiled. Her thoughts had reached the same point just at that moment.

Presently she bent over her Bible, turning the pages. ‘I am going to keep you to your promise, Dick,’ she said. ‘We will now read our evening Psalm.’ Dick produced at once the beautifully bound pocket Bible she had that morning given him.

He had known all along this was coming. It was the only thing she had asked of him. It seemed such a little thing, she who had given him all. He would do it willingly. He would do it with apparent appreciation and pleasure.

He remembered Alexander Herriot who had shown no sympathy with the things which meant so much to her. He remembered Alex Ross who had poured forth mocking blasphemy, she had hardly liked to repeat, when the terrified little bride of thirty-five years ago had called on God to help her. She should realize the contrast now.

He leaned forward toward the lamp and began a hasty search for the Psalms.

He hoped she was not noticing his floundering through Job and Proverbs.

He moved the purple ribbon and lodged it safely at the right page. He would not be caught again.

The Little white Lady seemed not to notice and was intent on her own page and then looked up.

‘It’s the ninetieth Psalm, Dick,’ she said, ‘and you shall read it to me, tonight. We’ll take it in turns each night to have the privilege of reading or the delight of listening.’

Dick had not bargained for this. He began nervously, in a great hurry and arrived at the end of the second verse completely out of breath.

The Little White Lady looked up quickly. ‘Oh, Dick’ she said, ‘I must tell you before we go any further, this first verse is my favourite out of the whole Bible. ‘Lord, Thou hast been our dwelling place in all generations.’ It is

so deeply restful. I should like it put on my tombstone! It explains the past and the present and gives such confidence for the future. Did you notice it was written by Moses of all people. I suppose no other person in the Bible changed his living place more often. He was born in a humble Jewish home in the land of Goshen and when he was only three months old he was floating homeless down the broad river Nile. Then he was adopted by an Egyptian princess and lived in a palace. Next he had to flee to the land of Midian and lived as a shepherd in the house of a priest. And after that he began forty years wandering in the wilderness, homeless and uncertain. At last death, alone on a mountain top, within sight of Canaan but unable to go in. Did ever a human heart experience such difficult changes. Yet he could sing with sublime assurance, 'Lord, Thou hast been our dwelling-place in all generations.' Dick, I love it that we should enter our home-life together, in this earthly dwelling place, by reading the prayer of Moses, this man of God. Begin again and read it slowly, dear boy, so that our hearts may have the leisure to respond to all the pathos and melody.'

Dick had had time to regain his breathe and to have his voice well under control. With an interest which surprised himself, he read, slowly and clearly, the inspiring words of trust and confidence. His own mind, as he read, passed beneath the spell of their power and beauty.

'Lord, Thou has been our dwelling-place in all generations.

Before the mountains were brought forth, or ever Thou hadst formed the earth and the world, even from everlasting to everlasting, Thou art God. Thou turnest man to destruction; and sayest, return, ye children of men.

For a thousand years in Thy sight are but as yesterday when it is past, and as a watch in the night. Thou carriest them away as in a flood; they are as a sleep; in the morning they are like grass which grows up.

In the morning it flourishes and grows up; in the evening it is cut down and withers.

For we are consumed by thine anger, and by thy wrath we are troubled.

Thou hast set our iniquities before thee, our secret sins in the light of thy countenance.

For all our days are passed away in Thy wrath: we spend our years as a tale that is told.

The days of our years are three score years and ten; and if by reason of strength they be fourscore years, yet is their strength labour and sorrow; for it is soon cut off, and we fly away.'

Suddenly Dick realised, as he read those solemn words, that this was a burial psalm. Today was their wedding day, his and his Little White Lady's, yet he was reading one of the psalms appointed for the burial service.

His voice faltered and shook. 'Soon cut off, and we fly away.' He always thought of her as spreading soft wings, white as the wings of a dove, and flying away. 'Soon cut off, soon cut off.' It sounded like the toll of a bell in the quiet room.

He hastened on to brighter verses.

'Make us glad according to the days wherein You have afflicted us, and the years wherein we have seen evil. Let Your work appear to Your servants, and Your glory unto their children. And let the beauty of the Lord our God be upon us: and establish the work of our hands upon us; yea, the work of our hands establish thou it.'

Dick reached the end almost unexpectedly. His voice suddenly ceased. Then, in the silence, his Little White Lady lifted her face which she had shielded with her hand.

Dick was amazed at its extraordinary radiance. She seemed completely unconscious of herself or of him, it seemed as though she were transported from all earthly surroundings. In time he was to grow accustomed to this radiant detachment, always produced by the reading of scripture. But, on this first night, it arrested him. He thought immediately of the closing verses he had just read. 'Let the beauty of the Lord our God be upon us.'

Presently she began to speak, very softly and tenderly, commenting on each verse, with a loving, lingering touch. Dick listened, spellbound; his attention riveted, not so much by that which she said, as by her manner of saying it. The keen delight in every thought, the vivid belief in every truth. Dick would have expected to be hopelessly bored by the whole thing but he was not bored at all. When at last she said, and now, shall we pray?' Dick quietly knelt down beside the table, folded his arms on it and bowed his head upon them. Unconsciously he came within the halo of golden light from the lamp. Then, as his Little White Lady concluded her words of confidence and love, Dick felt her soft hand laid gently upon his head.

'Lord, establish the work of his hands, the whole future of his hands establish Thou it. Then shall we both be satisfied and made glad during all the days to come.'

Dick's face was grave as he rose and stood beside the table. He hesitated, then made an effort to speak all that he was thinking.

'I wish it all meant more to me,' he said, slowly. 'You know, I can't honestly say that it means anything at all.'

'Never mind that, dear boy,' she said. 'It all remains very true and unchanged whether you feel able to believe it or not. We'll pray about your work each evening. And now, it has been a long day, I suppose we had better ring for Ellen.'

Dick walked over to the bell then hesitated. She had done so much for him, she was so dear, he didn't want the day to come to an end. He felt suddenly reluctant and rebellious. 'Couldn't I carry everything up? I could manage it all and you as well,' he said. She smiled. 'No thank you my dear young doctor. The lift is working and we have Ellen. I don't want her to feel deprived of any of her duties. Besides, I would rather say goodnight here, where we always have said it.'

Dick's eyes were mutinous. 'I hate handing you over to that stiff old dragon who marches you off and puts you to bed as if she were snuffing out a candle. It will snuff out my light when you are gone,' he added, as a romantic after thought. He liked that. It was rather poetic. He said it again. 'It will snuff out my light that you should go.' He said, gloomily. The Little White Lady did not speak. She pointed to the bell.

'Why should Ellen sleep in the room next to you?' Dick continued, 'she snores like a grampus. I heard her when I sat up, the last time you were ill. I'm at the farthest end of the passage. If I had Ellen's room you could call me in the night if you felt ill and I don't snore.'

'Thank you,' said Mrs. Herriot, gently. 'I don't wish to make any changes. I am used to having Ellen close at hand and her snoring doesn't disturb me in the least. Ring the bell, Dick.'

Still Dick hesitated.

'Please ring the bell, Dick.'

Dick rang the bell.

The Little White Lady rose and stood beside him

'Dear boy, it means so much to me to know you are at home in my house and need not go out to lonely, comfortless rooms.'

Ellen came in with the tot milk, a plate of sandwiches and a syphon of soda water. She had fastened a large white satin ribbon beneath her chin in honour of the day and was intensely conscious of it as she advanced into the room. Dick and his Little White Lady smiled at each other. The satin bow had helped them both over a difficult moment.

Mrs. Herriot moved toward the door following Ellen. Then she turned and put both her hands into his. Dick raised them and, bending his head, kissed them each in turn, with quiet reverence, very tenderly.

'Goodnight, my own Little White Lady,' he whispered.

'Goodnight, dear boy,' she said.

She passed out on to the landing where Ellen was waiting beside the lift.

Dick stood watching.

She entered the lift, the brass gate clanged. The lift mounted slowly.

Then Dick closed the door and walked into the empty drawing-room.

He sat down in his own chair, drew the lamp close and taking out his pocket Bible again, read the one verse in the Psalm which had been passed over by his Little White Lady, without comments. 'Now, why did she miss out that one verse,' he said aloud. It was the eighth.

'Thou hast set our iniquities before Thee; our secret sins in the light of Thy countenance.'

Chapter 17.

On the day which followed the announcement of the wedding in *The Times*, a good many letters arrived for Mrs. Herriot. Very few of them were seen by Dick.

Friends made appointments and called. She usually arranged to see them at a time when Dick was out.

Whatever explanations had to be made, she made them, unsupported. In the evening he found her calm and placid as usual, her mind absolutely free for his interests. In reply to Dick's anxious queries she merely said she had had a very pleasant afternoon.

One day she told him that a few of her particular friends were coming to tea. She would like him to be in, if at all possible. Dick turned up at tea time and found the drawing-room full of people.

Mrs. Herriot realised it was something of an ordeal for Dick and she watched him anxiously. But he faced it with a straitforward directness of bearing which made him at once master of the situation, completely disarming all criticism.

He surprised and delighted Mrs. Herriot herself.

There was no trace of the boyish manner to which, in the intimacy always existing between them, she had grown accustomed. He appeared among her guests as a man whose profession had accustomed him to being the centre of attention. He very quietly and simply took his place as master of the house, treating her guests with courtesy and tact. He gave to herself a deferential consideration and a watchfulness which completely captivated those who had been prepared seriously to question the wisdom of such a step she had so unexpectedly taken.

Lady Airth was present and immediately acclaimed Dick as the man who had saved the life of her cousin when everyone else had given her up. She said how charmed she was to meet him and promptly asked him to dinner. This marked friendliness of so popular a person as the Countess of Airth and Monteith at once decided the few who wavered in their attitude to Dick Cameron and the whole atmosphere expanded cordially.

Mrs. Herriot watched him yet with an added secret anxiety. Would all this appreciation on the part of her friends go to his head? However, Dick received all flattering advances with complete lack of self-consciousness, with the quiet self-respect of a clever man of the world. He had a reserve of manner, also, which discouraged any attempt at patronising and responded to all with perfect courtesy.

Mrs. Herriot had not seen her young doctor in a social scene before and it afforded her immense satisfaction and pleasure. His pranks at Dinglevale with the fallen idol and the large Lady of the Manor had not caused her to be

completely trusting and so she was surprised and delighted. When Lady Airth took her leave she bent over her and whispered, 'He is quite delightful. Had I a heart to lose, I should certainly leave it behind!'

The Little White Lady blushed and smiled and felt altogether proud and happy. She had expected trouble and annoyance from the step she had taken for Dick's sake but she had had nothing but pleasure.

Dick came up from spending the last few minutes with a personal friend, Helen West, showing her his study, and felt pleased with himself and at peace with the world. He entered the drawing-room, so lately filled with the babel of many voices, and saw his Little White Lady, in the soft sunset glow, standing alone at the window. She was watching the sun as it set behind the great trees in the park. Coming back and finding her alone and he having the right to remain when all the rest had gone, Dick was suddenly arrested by the fact of how much she had done for him. He realised for the first time the position she had given him in her which had sacrificed everything for his advancement and future benefit. He sensed the sweet mystery of the tie between them. His rapid step was checked. The laughing remark on his lips remained unspoken. He advanced slowly, in silence, and stood behind that little, fading figure waiting in the sunset glow.

'Come here, Dick,' she said, holding out her hand without turning. 'I want you to enjoy something I have enjoyed for years. I never grow tired of seeing the sunset from this window.' Dick took the outstretched hand, held it closely and stood beside her. house and toward her friends. He was overcome with the extraordinary selflessness

'It seems to vary with the seasons,' she said, 'in fact, almost daily. But always there is a kind of glory even in a stormy sky. But the one I love best is at the close of a hot summer day. As the sun sinks level with the spire of Christ Church in the distance, the whole park seems to glow. Everywhere you look there is a shimmering sea of golden haze and out of it all rises this lovely spire. I used to watch it all come and go and wonder where it came from and why it went. Then one day I found an answer. It was the dust of London, the hot, dry, weary dust of a hot, dry, weary day. But the sun, shining through it, turned that parched dust into gold. Then I made it into a parable and enjoyed it even more.'

‘Tell me the parable,’ said Dick and drew within his arm the hand he held. Leaning on him she answered. ‘There are so many sordid, common things in life, so much that falls beneath our vision of all that is beautiful and noble, and all our feeling of what is true. But love, stooping itself to think kindly and speak hopefully of them, changes them to pure gold.’

She leaned her cheek against his coat-sleeve, her eyes on the sunset.

‘Do you not think so, my dear young doctor?’

‘I think you bring out the best in everybody,’ said Dick, huskily, ‘providing there is a best to bring out.’

‘There is always a best,’ said she. ‘But I wasn’t thinking of myself.’

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At breakfast the next morning, Mrs. Herriot looked up from a letter she was reading. ‘Margaret writes asking whether I can see her at half-past four tomorrow. Business brings her to town and also shopping. I shall certainly say yes.’

Dick folded a letter he had just taken from an envelope and looked perplexed. He was not altogether pleased. Mrs. Herriot saw the look.

‘I can rest early,’ she continued, ‘and then I shall be ready. Dick, I haven’t seen Margaret since her father died last month. I think she may want to talk about that and her future plans. I hear the old home has been left to her jointly with her mother. That might complicate things as I wonder whether the excellent Eustace would want to live in the Hall.

He is the kind of man who prefers a smaller place, where his voice can be heard in every corner.’ Dick laughed.

‘He is a domineering, sanctimonious old beggar!’ he said, ‘I cannot imagine what Margaret was dreaming about when she married him.’

‘Margaret was dreaming,’ said Mrs. Herriot. ‘That was the trouble. So many girls dream until after the wedding. Then comes the awakening. However, we mustn’t criticise. Margaret is our friend and absolutely loyal to her husband. But I think, Dick, if you don’t mind, I will see her alone. She may wish to talk privately.’

For the moment Dick made no reply. He was thinking in perplexity of the letter he had just received himself from Margaret. It was short and curiously abrupt.

‘I wish to see you alone,’ it ran, ‘before I see Mrs. Herriot.

I am asking her to receive me at half-past four. But I shall

arrive soon after four. Please be in.'

Dick was puzzled. He would have handed the note across to Mrs. Herriot but just in case Margaret had something to say that might worry her, he didn't. It was silly of Margaret and seemed unnecessary. But he couldn't risk any shock to his Little White Lady, so he would see her and arrange to be in.

'I'd like to come in to tea,' he said, 'Margaret is such an old friend. As soon as tea is over I'll go and leave you two alone.'

'Very well, dear boy, of course, and personally, I shall prefer to have you there.'

The next day Dick seemed to have a full afternoon but hastened through his rounds. He intended to meet Margaret before she went in and take her straight to his study but he saw her disappear through the door and her taxi departing just as he arrived.

'Mrs. Royston, sir,' said Jarvis, 'and she is asking for you.'

'Thanks, Jarvis,' said Dick, 'I'm expecting her and she will be staying for tea. But on no account disturb Mrs. Herriot until half-past four.'

His heart was light. He felt unaccountably happy. He loved doing the honours in his Little White Lady's beautiful house. He would enjoy receiving Margaret there. And Margaret, of all people would understand what wonderful opportunities and possibilities the future now held for him. He opened the door and went in.

Margaret Royston stood in the centre of the room. The simple mourning clothes she wore added to the extreme dignity of her appearance. For as long as Dick could remember, her lovely face had shown great weariness and almost depression. But as she turned to face him he was startled by her pale beauty. There was nothing left of her recent, listless illness. Dick shut the door and came forward as she put her hands firmly behind her back.

'This is nice, Margaret. How are you?' he said, with a smile of genuine pleasure. 'I must say you look absolutely, er marvellous.'

But there was no question of her accepting his proffered hand. She looked coldly at him and avoided his question.

'Dick,' she said, 'you are about as low in my estimation as any man can get. You have married Mrs. Herriot solely for her money. There can be no other reason. You don't need to bother to deny it. Someone my mother and I know saw you reading the Herriot will at Somerset House. I might have

guessed anyway, remembering how you always scorned love and your constant declaration that love and ambition could never go together at all. Dick,. how could you do it? She is a perfect saint. She is all gentleness and goodness. Don't you know how sweet she is? She must have become the laughing stock of all her friends, of her whole world.'

Margaret paused. Her eyes were full of tears. But Dick's face had become white and hard. It had turned ashen when she mentioned Somerset House. Before the sudden fury in his eyes, her brave, angry spirit momentarily quailed.

His jaw was set in determined silence. He was coldly calm. It was as if the Capo di Monte Napoleon had at last risen from the chair and now faced her. He spoke in a terrible but low and restrained voice. 'If you say one word of all this to her or mention the will or money, I'll throttle you.'

'The threat revived Margaret's courage. She laughed. 'I dare say you will,' she said. 'But you are welcome to do it to me as long as you don't harm her. You've already murdered love and loyalty but you needn't worry, I haven't come here to say one word to trouble her. I've come to tell you I know you for what you are, and to let you know what I think of you. I've also come to see if you are treating her well. I dare say you think it is no business of mine but it is. I spent some of the happiest weeks of my life at Dinglevale and I learnt to love her. I learnt to trust her and believe in her and I won't stay away from her if she needs me or if ever she needs help. You have sacrificed her on the altar of your craven ambition and I would be a coward not to tell you.' Margaret paused, not for want of words but for want of breath.

A little gleam of angry amusement crept into Dick's hard eyes. 'I don't care one single, solitary damn what you think of me,' he said.

It maddened Margaret to see the scornful smile.

'I don't suppose you do.' she cried, 'I dare say you are very proud of your visit to Somerset House.'

The door opened quietly and the Little White Lady came in.

She realised at once the tense atmosphere in the room. She glanced at the two angry faces, at the two tall figures confronting one another. She turned and slowly closed the door, giving them time to fully realise her presence. Then she came forward, smiling.

‘Dear Margaret,’ she said, ‘am I late or are you early? However, Dick was here so you haven’t been left alone. Ring for tea, Dick. After an afternoon of shopping Margaret will be in need of a cup of tea. Come and sit beside me, Margaret dear. In spite of the strain and sorrow of these past weeks you are looking far stronger than when I saw you last.’ At the sound of her voice, Dick regained control of himself. He rang for tea and came at once to arrange a table and cushions for her. As he did so she leaned back and looked up at him with such a look of tenderness and affection, Dick’s sore heart bounded with a rush of relief and gratitude. ‘Has it been a good afternoon, dear?’ She asked. ‘Full up,’ said Dick, ‘and I worked hard to get back home in time for tea.’ ‘And I’ve been resting,’ she laughed, ‘and there is nothing like resting to make you long for a cup of tea. Draw up a chair, Dick, and we will be a very cosy little party.’

It took all Mrs. Herriot’s tact and an inexhaustible supply of charming conversation to justify the ‘cosy’ to describe the little party. Margaret and Dick both addressed remarks to her but neither spoke a word to each other. Dick did not once look in Margaret’s direction. Margaret scarcely took her eyes off Dick with a growing look of amazement as she noted the perfect understanding between Dick and his Little White Lady - his tender deference to her and her obvious affectionate pride in him. In this calm atmosphere of domesticity her own tempestuous outburst seemed an absurd nightmare. Yet the facts which had goaded her to this visit still remained. No explanation exonerating Dick could possibly be forthcoming.

Presently, in obedience to a look from Mrs. Herriot, Dick rose. ‘I’m afraid I must be off,’ he said, ‘I have so much writing to do before dinner.’ He bent over the sofa. ‘You will send for me if you want me? I shall be downstairs in the study.’ Then he bowed gravely to a tall vase of flowers just beyond Margaret’s troubled face and went quickly out.

Mrs. Herriot sent a smile after him which lingered on her lips after the door close. Then she folded her shawl round her, settled in her cushions and turned to Margaret. ‘Now, we can talk,’ she said.

Chapter 18

‘Now we can talk,’ said Mrs. Herriot, again, as the door closed behind Dick. ‘I half wanted him to stay away so that I could have you to myself but he wanted to be here for tea. Your friendship from his youth, Margaret, means a great deal to him. I trust you will let it continue as an influence for good in his life. Now, tell me all your plans, my dear. How is your Mother? I have felt so much for you these past sad weeks. I know the awful blank when a dear father is taken. Tell me all you can.’

Margaret did so and began to think her visit was going to result in nothing but talk about her own affairs. Then suddenly, when she was least expecting it, Mrs. Herriot said, ‘Was it a great surprise to you, Margaret, dear?’ Margaret did not pretend that she didn’t understand.

‘A tremendous surprise,’ she said.

‘I don’t wonder at that,’ remarked Mrs. Herriot, gently, ‘and I feel I owe you more of an explanation than anyone else, because I know your very deep love for Dick, dating back to so dear a childhood friendship. Also based on a very real interest in his spiritual welfare. It was a very important step and I have no doubt it brought about a good deal of comment and criticism among my friends. Margaret, no words can express what Dick means to me in his constant care and thought for me. He asked me to marry him so that he could be close enough to prolong my life, if possible, by his own skill and devotion. Dick stands to me in the position of a very dear and most completely trusted son. He treats me with the tender respect and reverence with which a young man of his age and fine, manly character would treat his mother. There is nothing more than that between us. Before I agreed to take that step, however, I made sure I had the opinion of a medical specialist in whom I place implicit reliance, that I am not likely to live more than a few months. So this nominal marriage with me will not stand in the way of Dick’s future happiness, or have time to grow into a burden on him.’

Margaret was almost holding her breath.

‘So, after much careful and prayerful consideration,’ Mrs. Herriot continued slowly, ‘I went through the ceremony of marriage with him in order to be able,

legally, to fulfil that which was my own earnest wish and desire to leave him my whole fortune. This would enable him to be unhampered by having to earn his own living and to be free to devote himself to whatever plans and schemes he has. I believe his professional ability will place him at the very front rank of mental specialists as well as his work in diseases of the heart. It will result in much benefit to sufferers from nervous and mental disorders. If I died a widow, Margaret, I had no control over my capital. I need hardly tell you would not have accepted so great a sacrifice from him if I had not known about my own prognosis.'

Margaret's lips were trembling.

'But Dick knew,' she said, and stopped.

'About my husband's will? Oh, yes, dear, of course Dick knew. I told him myself in fullest detail, not only about the will, but the complete history of the tragedy it brought into my life. I heard you talk to Dick about going to Somerset House,' Mrs. Herriot continued calmly, 'I'm sure he went there to make sure about the terms of the will.'

Margaret sat speechless.

The Little white Lady folded the soft wings of her shawl about her and leaned back amongst her cushions.

'One thing I must ask of you, dear Margaret. You will realise how sensitive Dick would be about this question of money. Could you not mention it at all to him or speak about the will or allow this story of his visit to Somerset House to go any further?'

'No, no of course, no, of course not, I promise.' Margaret faltered.

Mrs. Herriot leaned still further back against the cushions. Her hand stole to the place where the warning stab was apt to make itself felt.

'You are tired,' said Margaret, quickly. 'I've tired you! I must go.' The grey shadow on the delicate face alarmed her. 'Shall I call Ellen, or send for Dick?'

'No, no.' whispered Mrs. Herriot. 'Dick must not suspect any possible cause of fatigue in our conversation. He so quickly grows anxious over me and never allows a thing which has tired me to happen again. Oh, Margaret, no words can say how perfect our dear boy is to me! Will you always remember I told you this? If, when I am gone, he ever comes to you in

distress of mind, will you tell him I told you that his perfect care of me and goodness to me since the hour when he promised to love and to cherish, have been beyond all words? Will you tell him this, Margaret?’

‘I will,’ said Margaret, ‘if he ever turns to me.’ She could not keep back the tears as she knelt beside the sofa. She took the frail hands in hers and laid her cheek against them.

‘Mrs. Cameron,’ she said, ‘I must call you that just once because in my wicked heart I said I never would. I want to confess before I go. My life with Eustace has made me so hard and narrow. I love . . . And I love Dick more than any others in all the world. But when I heard the news, I criticised Dick badly. Can you forgive me?’

‘My child,’ said the Little White Lady, ‘love can forgive all wrongs, intended or not. The only unforgivable thing is a love which calls itself love yet fails to forgive. Now, we will both forget what we have just said except that we must never fail to be loyal to our husbands. Goodbye, Margaret, dear. God’s blessing go with you. Remember that I trust you.’

‘I’ll remember,’ whispered Margaret, her lips against the shining golden circle, guarded by three emeralds, the wedding ring which bound Dick to his Little White Lady. ‘I’ll remember.’

‘I trust you also, Margaret, to be good to Dick, always,’ said the voice she loved again, and with those words she would keep forever in her heart Margaret went out.

Meanwhile Dick walked restlessly to and fro in his study. He sat down at his table, trying to correct the proof of an article on which a good deal depended. Printers waited for it.

It should catch the evening post. But after a few attempts at concentration, he pushed it away and resumed his restless pacing. What was going on in the drawing-room upstairs? He could not have ignored Mrs. Herriot’s signal to depart and he had had the courage to leave the room but, once below, intolerable suspense had seized him.

He trusted both women, he knew, but Margaret was in possession his shameful secret. He suspected they were discussing the whole situation but surely Margaret would not betray him to his Little White Lady. Margaret evidently had a fierce temper when she was aroused, now he knew, but she had said she wouldn't do anything to hurt Mrs. Herriot. So that would help her to keep silent, but supposing something slipped out accidentally?

Dick now knew, he had been told in unmistakable language, what Margaret thought of him. Somewhere, at the back of his mind, he was aware of the horror of the shame of it all and he knew he would have to think it out. But just now he could think of nothing except possible pain for his Little White Lady.

So few months remained for him to care for her and repay a little of all she had done for him. He wished he had throttled Margaret there and then. No, that would not help matters. He could have forcibly removed her and shoved her into a taxi and told the driver to take her home and not stop until he got there. Why ever had she come to spoil the happiness of their peaceful home? So much was at stake at the moment. If Margaret thought of him like that, what would the woman he had wronged think of him. He didn't mind what she might say but of all she might suffer.

The Capo di Monte Napoleon in him rose from his chair and paced the floor with his chin sunk upon his chest and his hands in his pockets. Sombre fury against Margaret rose within him.

There was a gentle knock on the door.
'Come in,' he called. His own voice sounded hard and tragic, beyond recognition.
His eyes were on the door.
He hardly knew what he dreaded.
Ellen's knock was not so gentle. Hers was loud and curt.

The door opened and Margaret came in, closing the door behind her. His anger flamed more fiercely. She had contrived to give him yet another fright. But she came bravely up to him and her grief stricken eyes were on a level with his flaming ones.

If looks could slay, Margaret would not have left the room alive. But her consciousness of his anger was overruled by her own remorse. She was desperately unhappy.

'Dick,' she said. 'I've come to ask you to forgive me. I misjudged you and the whole situation. You are perfect to her. I imagined wrong where there is none. Dick. . Please, please forgive me.'

'I'll never forgive you,' said Dick, through gritted teeth, 'never.' He saw Margaret flinch and grow pale and it relieved his strained nerves. Margaret must suffer as he had suffered and that was all there was to it. 'Oh, Dick, please. Can't you possibly forgive me and forget the whole episode? I was so wrong.'

The demon of rage in Dick grinned delightedly. This was like a foolish move in a game of chess on Margaret's part. Dick took instant advantage of it.

'Certainly, I can forget,' he said. 'From this hour, I shall wipe you, your words and your suspicions, clean out of my mind. But, I shall not forgive you. Your insinuations are unforgivable.'

Margaret moved weakly toward the door then turned.

'Dick, let me explain. I know I was wrong but it was because I have cared so long about your spiritual life and you; and prayed that the faith you lost would come back. I think I was so angry when I thought when I thought what I did and after all my prayers '

Dick looked at her and laughed harshly. At that moment his soul felt at one with the blasphemous soul of Alec Ross. Nothing seemed too bad to think or say. 'Then heaven defend me from your prayers,' he said, 'and from all canting hypocrites. They say charity suffers long and thinks no evil and then they take away a man's character and ruin his life without giving him a chance to defend himself. If the God you believe in treated you as you treat others, you would have small chance of sitting on a damp cloud, twanging a harp throughout eternity.' He laughed again. Hell seemed to open at Margaret's feet. A great gulf yawned between her and Dick and between Dick and heaven and it seemed to be of her own making. She was now desperate enough to realise she had nothing to lose. She drew close to him and he took in her sweet loveliness, her nobility and womanly

grace but he also saw, now, her humbleness and her overwhelming unhappiness.

‘Dick,’ she said, ‘please, have pity, I am so miserable about all this. It was because I love you that I was so angry. I’m not afraid to tell you because I am absolutely loyal to Eustace and I know you are absolutely loyal to your . . . to your Little White Lady. But it all came about just like your fallen idol you loved. I felt the same about you. I had put you on a pedestal in the same way when we were children together. I love you, Dick,’

Oh, dear, now she had truly given him a weapon. He turned slowly and looked her up and down, scornfully. Then he walked slowly to the door and opened it.

‘Will you oblige me,’ he said, ‘by leaving my wife’s house?’

Margaret stood for one moment petrified by amazement and horror.

The queenliness in her nature came to the fore. She drew herself up and stepped forward. As he stood holding the door open she regarded him calmly with a cold, proud smile.

‘You have now been more cruelly unjust to me than I was to you. You have just behaved as your fallen idol did to you. But now, considering the probable presence of Jarvis in the hall, I must ask you to escort me from Mrs. Cameron’s house with the same courtesy you would show to any other woman she has honoured with her friendship.’

And Margaret swept from the room.

‘A taxi for Mrs. Royston, Jarvis,’ he said to the man in the hall. They were now both coldly self-controlled. He stood with her on the step, waiting a few moments.

‘Goodbye,’ said Dick as the taxi drew up and Jarvis opened the door. ‘I hope you will catch your train.’

‘Goodbye,’ she said, looking straight in front of her, ‘I’m sure I shall.’ She entered the taxi. ‘Tell him Charing Cross, please,’ she said to Jarvis, then, leaning forward, she smiled goodbye in Dick’s direction

The taxi-driver pinged down the indicator. Suddenly Dick ran down the steps and put his head in at the window. ‘Margaret,’ he said, ‘I’m so sorry, I do beg your pardon. Now we are quits. We will both forget, even if we can never forgive.’

‘We will both forget and forgive,’ said Margaret.
‘All right.’ he said, and thrust his right hand in at the window.
Margaret’s hesitation lasted long enough for her to hear a gentle voice whisper,
‘I trust you to be good to him, always.’

Then she put her hand into Dick’s. The taxi sped swiftly on its way.
Dick went back into the house and into his own room and shut the door.
Only two words stood out in the background of his mental vision as he thought
for a moment of all that had passed between them, those two words that had
been uttered by himself, ‘My wife.’ He had ventured to call his Little
White Lady that and the earth had not opened and swallowed him up. A
strange new sense stirred in his heart, a joy of manly pride in the fact that she
was his to protect and guard. Moreover he owed her a kind of loyalty of
thought, word and act. No younger woman’s charms could make him
swerve for one moment from that. This new thought in which he could be
loyal to her was balm just now, to the wound Margaret had inflicted on his
pride when he realised she knew about his former disloyalty.

He put all unpleasant memories of the past into the background and dwelt
deliberately on the beautiful present, which was still his.
Obviously Margaret had told her nothing. But, had she? He must make
sure at once.

He ran upstairs, two at a time, and entered the drawing-room. Mrs. Herriot
was seated on the sofa, an open telegram in her hand.
‘Dick,’ she said, ‘I was just going to send for you. Look, this has just
come for Margaret. It is from her mother and says, ‘Come home
immediately, what can we do?’
‘There is nothing to do,’ said Dick, lightly. ‘She is well on her way home
now. I saw her into the taxi. I should think the excellent Eustace has a
toothache!’
‘Don’t joke, Dick. It may be something quite serious for Margaret. Let’s
hope not.’
Dick crumpled up the telegram and made a shot at the wastepaper basket.
He had not come up to talk about Margaret. He dropped on one knee by the
table and laid his hand over the hand which wore his wedding ring. He did
not know how recently Margaret’s lips had rested on it nor how lately
Margaret’s tears had fallen on it.

‘You look so tired,’ he said, ‘did Margaret say anything which worried you?’
‘No,’ she answered. ‘Nothing which need have worried me. Naturally I felt grieved over her anxieties and sorrows.’

Dick felt himself pursued by Margaret’s sorrows, past and present but he restrained his impatience.

‘Did any comment she made about us, you and me, trouble you at all?’

‘I felt it necessary to explain things to Margaret a little more clearly than to most people. So everything was put right.’

‘Easily?’

She smiled. What did he call easily, she wondered. ‘Quite, Dick, quite easily.’

He could not hold back a sigh of relief. No harm had been done.

The sweet sense of possession again stirred in his heart. No-one could take her from him. Nobody. Nothing. Death should not take her from him.

He would fight death, day by day, hour by hour. Who was the fool who had told her she could only live six months? He knew his business - worse luck. But how dared he tell her. His clasp on her hand tightened.

‘I ought to be reading some proof,’ he said, ‘but I’m going to stay with you. It is so perfect to be left by ourselves when tiresome people like Margaret take themselves off at last.’

She drew her hand away and gave him a playful pat. ‘You are wrong there, dear boy. Margaret is not at all tiresome. Few people are dearer to me than she has become. She is a very noble girl. Also, my dear doctor ought to see that his patient has become exceedingly tired. I shall dine upstairs alone. Will you please ring for Ellen.’

Ellen was summoned and Dick’s proof caught the post.

But he felt he had had a surfeit of Margaret when he received a little note from his Little White Lady asking if he would kindly send a telegram to Margaret to see if everything was really all right and she had arrived home safely. Dick

smiled as he read her initials on the note, H.R.H. He was glad she had not changed them. He glanced at his watch. There was still time to send a wire and receive a reply. He wrote it and handed it to Ellen.

‘I wish she would not worry herself about other people’s troubles. Tell her I will send the answer up when it comes. And Ellen, fetch me at once if she wants me.’

‘I will indeed, sir,’ said the faithful Ellen emphatically.

The answer arrived while Dick was finishing his dinner. But he didn't send it up to Mrs. Herriot's room. He sat staring at it blankly for a few seconds. Then he wrote a quick note to Mrs. Herriot.

'Reply just come. Margaret arrived home safely and is all right.
Send for me if you need me. Sleep well, goodnight. Dick.

Then he rose and went to his study.

He stood by the mantelpiece where he and Margaret had spoken so angrily together only a short while ago. Where he had been so cruel to her in response to her pleas for forgiveness. For once his natural selfishness had no place. He was dumb and dismayed at the blow that had fallen on her, this woman who had been his friend from childhood.

Taking the telegram, he read it through again. It was signed by the doctor who had sent the first one. It was very clear and unmistakable.

'The Rev. Eustace Royston in attempting to save a child was knocked down by a car this afternoon and killed instantly. Mrs. Royston has returned.'

So the life-slayer, as Lady Airth had called him, the man who disliked all children, considering them quite unnecessary, had lost his life in an attempt to save a little child.

A man's instinct is sometimes nobler than his reason, thought Dick, with unaccustomed insight. Like Shakespeare's Malcolm in his tribute to the Thane of Cawdor - 'Nothing in his life became him like leaving it.' These thoughts lay vaguely at the back of Dick's mind. His more defined feelings were for Margaret. Then his whole mind centred on his Little White Lady. 'She must not know until tomorrow morning.'

Putting away the telegram, he was soon deep in the study of a work on the treatment of neurasthenia by a great German specialist.

But in her widowed home, Margaret Royston wept with a passionate self-reproach which her mother could not fathom. It was because, on that very afternoon, in her talk with Mrs. Herriot, she had allowed herself to say the first disloyal word which had ever passed her lips during all her married life with Eustace.

Chapter 19

As calm succeeds storm in nature, so in life, a time of peaceful quiet often follows hours of mental stress and strain. So it was with Dick and his Little White Lady.

The weeks after Margaret's stormy visit were happy but uneventful for both of them - uneventful except for the ever-increasing interest of Dick's work which daily became a more direct preparation for greater things to be accomplished in the future.

The news of Margaret's tragic bereavement, although broken gently by Dick on the following morning, came as a great shock to Mrs. Herriot. It was increased by the fact the Margaret had been with her at the time of the accident.

Her wish to go to Margaret was firmly overruled by Dick, who knew the intense power of true sympathy and which would wear out that failing heart more quickly than anything else. So constant letters passed between them and Dick was given continuing information as to Margaret's welfare.

'They will close the Hall and go abroad, probably to Italy for the winter,' said Mrs. Herriot one evening, looking up from the letter. 'Margaret and her mother together. I think it is a good plan although I wish Margaret could have a happier companion. A mother and daughter widowed in the same year. It is so sad. Margaret writes hopefully of taking up life again at the Hall, the home of her childhood. It will be lovely there in spring and summer. Perhaps you will go and see her, Dick. You might run down on the anniversary of the day you saved that precious life.'

'Certainly we will go, if you wish it,' replied Dick, hastily. He could not bear the way in which she now left herself out of all plans, even in the immediate future. Each day he grew more eager not to lose her and yet each day he saw her gently fading and failing. Her questioning eyes were raised to his but he averted his gaze and hurried to answer.

'I'm glad she feels able to take up life again. As a matter of fact she now really has a chance to begin life for the first time. She has been pretty well snubbed and squashed out of existence all these years.'

‘Hush, dear boy,’ said Mrs. Herriot to this. ‘It is often the case that all our virtues are remembered after we have gone and I like to think all our faults are hidden and forgotten. Perhaps it will be that all those that think unkindly of me will remain silent and those who speak will only say kind things. Then, if I think of earth at all, I shall think of it as such a loving place.’ Dick got up and sat on the floor beside her couch. He leaned his head against the soft, white rug which covered her.

‘My own Little White Lady,’ he said, ‘nobody could ever speak unkindly of you! But do not talk of dying as if death were near. Don’t you remember? My care of you means twenty years. I can’t bear it when you talk of going. Don’t you know I cannot live without you.’

Her hand dropped to his head. She softly stroked his hair and looked into his earnest eyes.

‘We have been very happy together, Dick, haven’t we? Has it been a real home to you?’

‘It has been, and is, the only home I have ever known, the only home I shall ever know,’ Dick said. ‘It has made life altogether different to have you to care for and to care for me. If you leave me I shall be, utterly, altogether, completely alone.’

She put her hand over his eyes. There was a quality in their brightness she couldn’t bear to see. That there should be unshed tears in those brave, brown eyes at the thought of losing her, made life very sweet for the Little White Lady. But it made it more difficult to face, with resignation, the call which she knew drew daily nearer and more insistent. Yet her work for Dick was by no means finished. Much remained to be done.

He took her hand and slipped it under his cheek twisting their wedding ring and the emeralds that guarded it. Uninterrupted silences had always been a habit of theirs. They were apt to last longer now.

She watched his face, noting its look of strength and gravity, realising how much he had grown and matured since she had given him the position of wealth and the responsibilities which went with it.

She realised also the gradual mental change in him, the unconscious growth of reverence for the things she held dear and sacred. He had a dawning belief in love and sincerity and goodness; a greater tolerance for those from whom he differed.

Yet his attitude towards the Unseen God she loved was still 'agnosco' I know not, rather than 'credo' I believe. He seemed no nearer any definite profession of faith.

If she must leave him now, having given him wealth, position, belief in earthly love alone, her work would indeed be unfinished and her aim unaccomplished. Yet tonight, though absolutely free from pain, she felt that strange flagging of life at its very centre which seemed to her a warning that not very long remained. It was so marked on this particular evening that it gave her a sensation of falling gently through space and yet remaining in the surroundings of her own drawing-room, held there by the fact that her eyes were fixed on Dick and she could still feel him twisting her rings.

Suddenly she said, and it seemed as though her voice came from very far away, 'Not alone, dear boy, I shall not, by going, leave you alone, but free. Free to find the woman who can truly be your mate and companion, the mother of your children, your wife in every sense, a real helpmeet for you. She shall wear the emeralds and your wedding ring.'

'I don't want her,' said Dick, abruptly. 'I don't want to be free. I don't want anybody but you.'

His voice brought her back with a jerk. She had hardly realised she had spoken. She had said more than she intended to say. Presently she seemed to be rising up among the stars.

She smiled upon him from afar.

He threw his other arm across her and took her other hand in his. She felt his fingers steel to her pulse. Then she fell asleep.

While she slept she felt a strong stream of life pouring into her, first in her hands then all over like warm wine in every vein. After a few minutes she woke.

Dick was still on the floor beside her clasping both her hands tightly. She was safely back on her sofa. She smiled at him. 'Better?' he asked.

'Much better,' she said. 'Quite rested. I took a little nap. In my young days people were constantly taking naps. In this twentieth century life moves too rapidly. How long did mine last?'

'Barely five minutes but it has worked wonders.'

‘It has,’ she said, ‘I feel strong and well again, almost young. I’ll sit up again now and we will have just one game of chess then you will have the rest of the evening free.’

The game was brisk and happy but Dick stood no chance. His Little White Lady had woken with her mind fully alert. He watched her swiftly moving hands through which his strong vitality had poured. If strength of will could hold her here, and he knew it was possible, he would not let her go.

So the cosy days of winter passed and spring awoke to the song of the thrush. And Mrs. Herriot saw, from her balcony, a thing she had hardly expected to see again, the exquisite budding green of the trees in the park and golden crocuses lifting their joyous faces to the warmth of the March sunshine.

‘Tonight we have the 139th psalm,’ said Mrs. Herriot, and it is my turn to read. I am glad because for all the wonderful psalms in this wonderful book, this goes deepest. It takes knowledge of everyone of us with complete understanding, yet full of tender forgiveness and power to change.

See how it starts Dick, ‘O, Lord, thou hast searched me and known’
A folded piece of paper marked the psalm in Mrs. Herriot’s Bible.
Before beginning to read she took it from its place between the leaves and laid it on the table beside her. Then she bowed her head.
‘O Spirit of God,’ she said, ‘Thou who searchest and knowest every thought of our hearts, even the most secret, be with us, in power, while we read Your word tonight.’

A sense of awe came over Dick. For the first time in his life he was conscious of an unseen Presence, of a power which shook his soul, of a voice which spoke to him in the secret chambers of his own inner being, even while he sat listening to the quiet voice beside him. ‘O Lord, Thou has searched me and known *me*.’

She paused and looked up.

‘The ‘me’ is in italics, Dick. It was not in the original. It has been made personal to each of us. She bent her head and continued through the psalm, pausing once. ‘Whither shall I go from Thy Spirit? Whither shall I flee from Thy Presence? If I ascend up into heaven, Thou art there; if I make my bed in hell, behold, Thou art there.’

Isn't it amazing, Dick. The darkness and the light are both alike to Him?
A radiance of light illumined the Little White Lady's face. She looked at Dick.
In his eyes she saw something which made her heart stand still.
Instinctively her left hand stole to the folded paper beside her and covered it.
She went on reading.
'How precious also are Thy thoughts unto me, O God!'

For a moment she seemed lost in reverie. Every word seems precious to her,
thought Dick, as her voice slowed. 'The thoughts of earthly friends are
scarcely precious when they find out our wrong doings. They are apt to be
harsh thoughts and possibly unjust. But God's thoughts are precious to us
because, knowing, as we have just read, He has complete knowledge of us
and if this is followed by our full confession and repentance, it means full
forgiveness. This is the perfect atonement of the precious blood for us.'

Then her voice quickened with something like joy. 'Let's pass on to the last
two verses, Dick. They have been my lifelong prayer.
'Search me, O God, and know my heart: try me and know my thoughts:
And see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way
everlasting.' She stopped.

Mrs. Herriot was shielding her face with her hands. Her reading had merged
into prayer.

Dick sat staring straight before him. Where had he heard those words
before? Where had he last heard that prayer? Suddenly he remembered.
His mind went back twenty years. He saw himself in the church at
Dinglevale, a small boy of seven, standing beside his great-Aunt Louisa in the
Rectory pew gazing at the hole in the stained glass window. It was the
Sunday after he had broken the halo. He could hear himself repeating the
Psalm in his childish voice, 'Search me, O God and know my heart: See if
there is any wicked way in me and lead me in the way everlasting.'
Twenty long years ago. And all that time he had gone his own way,
believing in nothing, living for self-advancement. And here he found
himself confronted with this very psalm, in the golden halo of light cast by
the lamp of his Little White Lady, whose gentle voice and tender loving-
kindness had brought him to wish he could believe and to wish he could pray
and think her cherished Bible to be true. Was it possible, after all, that
God had been leading him all the while?

Was it possible that He really knew and yet knowing still wished him well and still held open a door to everlasting life?

Suddenly Dick pushed back his chair and knelt down.

'I'll pray that, too,' he said. 'Perhaps as you are here, God will listen to me.' Mrs. Herriot sat very still and waited.

'Search me, O God,' began Dick and stopped.

The room was suddenly very quiet. No sound broke the stillness but the solemn ticking of the clock.

'O God,' said Dick, with a sudden movement dropping his head in his hands, 'O, God forgive me Help me to tell her the truth.'

She did not speak but looked at him with a great tenderness. She saw the clenched hands and heaving shoulders. She had to let him fight it out alone. Once she heard a dry hard sob. She longed to lay a hand on his head but she could only sit and wait, praying silently that the Spirit of God would complete His own work in this torn heart.

At last Dick lifted a haggard face, and looked at her. 'Before I asked you to marry me,' he said slowly, 'before I ever even thought of it, I knew about the Herriot will. Sir James Montford told me. I went to Somerset House and looked it up. I knew if I could persuade you to marry me you would leave me the money that you would have by a second marriage. I wanted it so that I could get ahead in my profession. I had all the notes but I dropped them here and Ellen found them and put them in the fire. I can't expect you to believe it but every word I said about wanting to look after you and care for you was true. Only I still put the money first.' Dick faltered.

'Then you told me the story of Alexander Ross and all your suffering and all you had to go through and that night.,' His voice broke.

'My Little White Lady, that night I thought only of you. I realised though that I was not better than he was but you, in your great generous goodness, little dreaming what I had done, accepted me, and for the very reason for which I had asked you. My one hope was, that you would never know.'

Dick's voice lost some of its anguish but he knew he must continue now to tell her all of it 'I grew to love you so much, the thought of making you suffer, just as I am doing now. I grew to love you so much, not for anything you had to give me or could do for me but for you alone, just because you were

you. That is the exact truth, .and if some day you could feel able to forgive me, perhaps then God would too, and lift me out of this awful despair.'

Dick's slow, difficult utterance came to an end as he lifted his eyes and wistfully, humbly looked into hers. Her face was illumined with a great love and tenderness and Dick gazed at her in bewilderment. At last she spoke. 'Oh, my darling boy,' she said, 'my own dear child, I forgave you months ago.'

'You've, you've known,?' she opened the paper and placed it in his hand. 'It was I who found it, not Ellen. Dick, I knew you would tell me about it one day.'

'But in that case,' stammered Dick, 'why did you,?' He could go no further. 'Why did I marry you, Dick? Because I completely forgave you. Because I believed in you and I loved you and I knew that some time, in His own time and way, God would work all things together for good. Darling boy, I trusted you.'

Dick was holding the paper, mechanically folding and unfolding it. 'O God,' he said suddenly, 'I'm finished.' His face was flushed and hands clenched. 'How can I go on, I feel broken.' He stood up, the paper dropping from his fingers. She pushed away the table and held out her arms, 'Dick,' she said, 'come to me.'

Chapter 20

The next moment Dick's head was in her lap, his arms flung about her and he was sobbing just as the little Dick of long ago had sobbed at his mother's grave. Mrs. Herriot knew that the strongest of men, when their depths are reached have the heart of a child. What his Little White Lady said, and how she soothed him, is known to Dick alone. He will hold it in his heart until he dies and after.

Presently she drew his head from her lap to rest in her bosom wrapping her arms around him as if to shield him from any further pain.

‘Dick, dear,’ she said, ‘my poor earthly love is a pale reflection of the love of God. Can you believe that He loves you, knowing far more about you than I ever will?’

Dick answered slowly, he was anxious to be perfectly honest.

‘Helen,’ he said, for she had said that to him that made any other name impossible ‘Your love and God’s are so mixed up in my mind that I think I shall have to get them sorted out before I know exactly what I believe.’ He waited, giving himself time.

‘But I should have certainly gone on forever not knowing what I believe, unless Helen, I had seen the Christ in you.’

The sweet reverence in his voice rewarded her for all she had suffered, all she had done, the self-sacrifice, the patience, the forgiving love.

Anyway, her tears fell on his face and in thinking of them afterwards he felt sure they were tears of joy.

Suddenly he held his breath to listen and for a moment she wondered to what. Then she knew as she realised he rested on her heart.

He raised his head, still kneeling at her feet and looked at her with anxious eyes.

‘You are tired,’ he said. ‘My Little White Lady, you are tired. I have put you through so much. Have you any pain? Do you feel faint?’

She smiled into his eyes. ‘No, my young doctor. I feel quite well - quite strangely well and happy beyond all words to express. But I will leave you now and go and rest. No, dear, don’t ring for Ellen. I want you to stay here, just as I leave you, for a little while. I want you to kneel on, as you have been and then nothing and no-one will come between you and your Lord. You will be able to say, ‘O, Lord, Thou hast searched me and known me . . . You no longer need a go-between. I leave you to my Lord and yours. She put her hands on either side of his face and looked long into his eyes.

Then she bent forward and laid her lips on his. It was the first time his Little White Lady had ever kissed him. It was the first time Dick had received a kiss of love from any woman’s lips.

To him it seemed a strange, sweet benediction. It was a mystery he could not fathom. For one long moment her gentle soul and his were one.

'Goodbye,' she said, 'my own dear boy, goodbye.'

'Not goodbye,' he whispered, 'only goodnight.'

'All right then, dear one, goodnight.'

'Goodnight my queen,' said Dick, as she slipped from his detaining arms.

'I like the old name best,' she said, as she bent over him again, smiling.

'Goodnight, my Little White Lady,' said Dick and felt her go.

As the door closed behind her he did as she had said. He knelt alone, where she had so lately sat, folded his arms upon the velvet couch and leaned his head upon them. Then the spirit of prayer awoke within him.

Divine love reached and found him.

The prodigal son came home to his Father's house.

When at length Dick rose the hands of the clock were near to midnight. He was surprised to find how long he had been kneeling. He took up his pocket Bible and then looked for the folded piece of paper. He remembered she had dropped it in the fire as she passed.

How completely she had forgiven him!

The chessmen and board lay forgotten on the table. It was the first time he had known her go upstairs without them.

He picked them up thinking it would please her to know he had remembered.

He switched off the lights and softly mounted the stairs. Outside the Little White Lady's room he paused. All was quiet.

As he passed down the passage, Ellen appeared on the landing, holding a candlestick in her hand.

'What's up, Ellen?' he asked, 'Is she ill?'

'She is not, sir,' replied Ellen, in a sepulchral whisper. 'I left my lady most comfortable and quiet, doing a little writing and almost asleep. She came up so cheerful and took the stairs without any effort.'

'Took the stairs?' exclaimed Dick.

'Well, she went up as though she walked on air, sir, and wouldn't let me call you. I can't have him disturbed just now, Ellen, said she.'

'Oh, Ellen, Ellen. She has already had tonight more to bear than was good for her. She just must not use the stairs anyway. Another time fetch me

without asking. Well, go to bed, my good Ellen and if you hear a sound in her room, go in. And if there should be the slightest need, fetch me instantly.'

Dick went to his room closing the door noiselessly. Then he stood stock still, considering. So - she had walked upstairs and after the long strain of her talk with him and still concerned about Margaret. 'Oh, my poor Little White Lady,' groaned Dick. 'We do give you an awful lot to bear!'

He kicked off his shoes, opened his door and stood listening. Then he walked down the passage and listened intently the closed door. All was perfectly quiet, except that, while he listened, Ellen started a low, contented snore.

Dick smiled and walked noiselessly back to his room. He tried to undress but was seized by a fit of intolerable anxiety. Supposing the deathly faintness came on and she could not even press the bell at her bedside which rang in Ellen's room? What if she called Ellen but refused to have him fetched until it was too late for remedies?

He walked up and down the room. She had become so wonderful, so precious to him now. He could not face the possibility of losing her. He had not yet allowed himself to realise all it meant, this strange, sweet glow and glory in his heart.

But he knew his Little White Lady loved him with a love altogether above his comprehension, beyond his experience. Yet the depths of his nature responded, just as, tonight, his soul had responded to spiritual truths which were as yet mysteries but which he accepted in simple faith and knew that, day by day, he would go on to fully apprehend. Earthly love and heavenly love had been revealed to him together and his heart stood still at the threshold of these holy sanctuaries.

'You must be born again,' sums up, in one significant sentence, the childlike attitude of mind which accepts at first without question, that which is altogether beyond the grasp of unaided human intellect. Then it grows up, by degrees, to full spiritual comprehension.

Still in his shirt sleeves Dick sat down and tried to concentrate on the story of the prophet Jonah.

His mind was gripped just at that moment by its rugged, dramatic power. Here was a man who deliberately turned from his God, who declined to obey, yet, when, humanly speaking, life was over - was brought up from the depths and given a second chance. It appealed to Dick.

Then he turned back to Psalm 139 and read it through again, with the experience of Jonah fresh in his mind. He realised there were certain similarities. 'Search me - try me - know me - lead me.' And then he read again, 'If I ascend up into heaven or make my bed in hell - even there - or if I take the wings of the morning and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea' -- like Jonah. And God was even there.

Jonah knew it, in his desperate circumstances, to be true. Dick knelt again and tried to pray that he might be worthy of the great earthly love which had brought him to realise the divine love. But, even as he prayed, a terrible sense of loneliness overwhelmed him.

He had nobody on earth save her and she was so frail, her hold on life so precarious.

If he could only see her, for one moment, hear her voice again, hold her hands in his, and know that she rested peacefully, he would be content. He looked at his watch. It was nearly two o'clock in the morning. He had promised never to go into her room unless she sent Ellen to fetch him. His sense of loneliness and anxiety became almost unbearable.

Suddenly he picked up his coat and put it on. He knew he was released from that promise. He could not explain how but he knew it.

He opened his door and walked quickly down the passage. The hall clock struck two. Outside her door he paused. All was quiet within. He would enter noiselessly. If she slept he would slip out again. If she were awake . . . If she were awake? Oh, blessed tender Little White Lady of his own. If she were awake, he would explain and surely he could trust her to understand. Dick put his hand on the door handle, turned it softly and stepped into the room. The night light burned beside the bed. As he stood immovable, listening, Dick suddenly knew he was alone in the room.

Yet the form of his beloved Little White Lady lay on the bed. He closed the door and turned on the electric light. As he looked down at the peaceful face, at those folded hands, he recalled the words she had read that very night in the room below - 'When I awake, I am still with Thee. His Little White Lady had wakened already in the presence of her Lord.

Dick dropped on his knees beside the bed. He laid his fingers on her wrists, he listened to the silent heart - mechanically, hopelessly. He knew already there was nothing to feel, nothing to hear, nothing to be done. His Little White Lady had spread her soft, silvery wings and flown away. Dick could just see what had happened.

Prayer had merged into sleep and earthly sleep had gently changed into Other slumber from which his voice could never waken her.

'When I awake, I am still with Thee.' She had not known death, she had gone from the earthly life into the heavenly one. Dick looked around.

On the table by her bed lay her Bible, open at the fly-leaf. It bore her full name in ink, in her own handwriting. Beneath it was written,

'For Dick, from his Little white Lady.'

The date was from the evening before.

Between the Bible and the night light lay a sheet of paper and upon it gleamed her emerald ring. On the white paper was written, faint and scarcely legible. 'For Margaret.'

But a line had been drawn through those words and below appeared,

'For my Dick's wife -- some day.'

Dick folded the paper and slipped it with the ring into his waistcoat pocket.

'I'm glad she didn't leave it to Margaret,' he thought, 'because now it will always be mine. I shall never want another wife. He groaned.

In that moment he first realised she was gone from him.

He covered those folded hands with his own and laid his head upon them.

At length he rose and stood looking down on the quiet face. Already the hand of death had worked that strange miracle which foreshadows eternal youthfulness in life to come. All lines had been smoothed away. A look almost of youth was growing on that peaceful face. Dick remembered how

he had once said to her, standing just there by her bed, 'You will never be old. You have a young soul. You are one of life's evergreens.'
How true it was. The worn out body lay there but the lovely soul had passed on into the immortal glory of a fuller life.
Then Dick remembered that for years he had scoffed at the idea of resurrection and denied the future existence of the soul

She had several times been distressed at chance remarks he had made implying his disbelief in a future life. He turned and, taking up her treasured Bible, her gift to him, he closed it and held it firmly in his hand. The face of his Little White Lady seemed to smile. Did she know what her young doctor was going to do?

The soft, shaded light sent a halo of glory around the pillow, shining on the silvery hair and illumining the gentle face.

And, in that sacred moment, Dick Cameron's broken halo was restored to him, complete.

He laid his left hand on those folded hands; he raised her Bible in his right and with unfaltering voice, he said clearly: 'I believe in the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body and the life everlasting.' Then he went to call Ellen Ransom.

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