

RANDOM HOUSE  BOOKS



Doctor Rose

Elvi Rhodes

About the Book

To be a woman doctor in the 1920's was tough, especially if you worked in the Welfare Centre of an industrial Yorkshire town. Rose - who had the added disadvantage of being young and pretty - found she had to cope with elderly male prejudice from those above her, and apathetic ignorance and poverty from those she was trying to help.

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About the Author

Also by Elvi Rhodes

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Doctor Rose

Elvi Rhodes

*To Harry
with my love*

I acknowledge with gratitude the help of Dr R. A. Leake,
who checked all the medical details in this book.

PART ONE

Chapter One

ROSE SAT UPRIGHT in the high-backed, leather-covered chair. She was small, slightly built, and if she leaned back at all she thought it would engulf her. Clearly it was not a woman's chair. It was a chair built for the kind of men who faced her in a semi-circle across the polished table; solid-looking men with dark suits of best Yorkshire worsted; with high, stiff, gleaming white collars - and with gold alberts slung across ample stomachs; men whose shapes and appearances befitted them for their roles as Town Councillors of Akersfield.

It was not so much that they faced her as that she must face them. She was the sole object of attention of all seven members of the Health Committee. On these men depended whether she did, or did not, get the job. And she wanted the job. She wanted it badly.

'Have any of your family been doctors, then? Does it run in the family?'

The questioner, sitting on the Chairman's right, was different from his colleagues; younger looking, with no sign of grey in his dark hair, his face lively and alert. Up to now he had seemed to be the one most in her favour. But better not take anything for granted, Rose thought.

'No Sir. I'm the first of my family to qualify.'

'Speak up Doctor Stanton. You young people all mumble nowadays. There's no need to be nervous, you know. Just answer the questions in a nice clear voice.'

The speaker this time was an elderly man whom the Chairman had earlier addressed as Councillor Patterson. Rose had already diagnosed that he needed his ears syringing - that or a deaf aid, poor man. From the irritated

looks his remarks drew from the others she guessed that he made this complaint at every meeting.

'I'm sorry,' she said, raising her voice. 'I said I'm the first of my family to train as a doctor.'

'What does your father do?'

'What made you want to do it?'

'Don't you reckon it's a rum job for a woman?'

The questions now came from all sides, as if they wanted to shoot her down with rapid fire. The last speaker seemed especially hostile. It wasn't his first antagonistic question. She manifestly found no favour with him and she wondered how much influence he had with the rest of the Committee.

'My parents keep an inn in the Dales,' she said. 'In Faverwell. It's been in my father's family for four generations. Just a small inn.'

Too small, she thought, to bear the expense of her training. And yet it had. Her parents had never made enough money to save much and it was only by mortgaging the inn to the bank that they'd been able to send her to Medical School. It was a measure of her father's love for her that he, who had never owed a penny in his life and couldn't bear the thought of debt, had steeled himself to go cap in hand to the bank and to put all he owned at risk for her career. That was one of the reasons she needed this job, so that she could begin to repay her parents.

'As for what made me want to do it,' she said. 'It's difficult to tell. I just know I've never wanted to do anything else ever since I can remember, ever since I was a child.'

That was true. She recalled her mother complaining to a neighbour 'Our Rose doesn't play with her dolls properly. Not like Emily does. She paints measles spots all over 'em and puts 'em to bed. Or puts their arm in slings and their legs in splints. It's not natural in a little girl.'

The tetchy-sounding man was repeating his question.

'I said don't you think it's a rum job for a woman?'

She met his disagreeable look with her own direct one, schooling herself to speak calmly, hoping her irritation didn't show in her face. It wasn't the first time she'd been asked that particular question and it was too much to hope that it would be the last.

'I agree that there still aren't many women doctors,' she said. 'Though there are more now than before the war. But in this case I think being a woman gives me a real advantage. Whoever works in your Welfare Centre will be dealing all the time with women and children, mothers and babies. I like to think I understand them.'

'I reckon Doctor Stanton has a point of view there,' the man on the Chairman's right said. 'A very good point.' He had a pleasantly deep voice with slightly drawn-out north country vowels. It was a reassuring voice.

'But she knows nothing of the married state,' another man objected. 'Now some of our other applicants are family men, with wives and children.'

'Doctor Stanton - if she were to be appointed - wouldn't be without a man's guidance,' the Chairman said. 'She'd be working under a male doctor.' He looked towards Rose. 'The Medical Officer for our welfare services is a man, a Doctor John Stanton as it happens. Now *there's* something that could cause confusion, I'm afraid. Two doctors with the same name!' He shook his head as if he had suddenly found an insuperable problem.

'Which I'm sure could be sorted out,' the man on his right put in. 'She could be Doctor Rose, I daresay.' His eyes twinkled and he lengthened the sound of her name, rolling it off his tongue slowly as if he was reluctant to let it go.

I like the sound of that, Rose thought.

'Yes, well, there's a lot more to be settled than that,' the Chairman said hastily. 'Now I suppose you're not engaged to be married or anything like that, are you? You're not courting?'

'No, nothing like that.'

Just as well, she thought, that Gerald, busy in his veterinary practice up in the Dales, couldn't hear her decisive reply. It wouldn't please him.

'Good! As you know, we don't employ married women.'

And that's something I'm prepared to argue about. Rose thought, but not just now.

The Chairman shuffled through his papers, scanning them as if he sought fresh inspiration.

'Well then Doctor Stanton,' he said, not finding it, 'I think that's about all. There's nothing wrong with your training. Leeds is a highly-respected Medical School. It's turned out some good doctors. I see you won a scholarship. And then you've had a couple of years on the wards of our own Akersfield hospital and they speak well of you. I think also we've fully explained what the job is.' He glanced around the rest of the Committee. 'Have any of you gentlemen any more questions for the young lady?'

A man raised his hand.

'I'd just like to ask Doctor Stanton why she isn't considering going into private practice?'

Rose hesitated before replying.

'Naturally I have considered it. I suppose most doctors do. In the first place I have to admit that I couldn't afford to buy into a practice. But if I put up a plate on my own I might have to wait a long time for patients to come to me. I couldn't afford that either.'

'You mean people don't trust women doctors like they do men? Well I'm sure that's true enough!'

The speaker was the awkward man. I've played right into his hands, Rose thought angrily.

'But more important,' she continued firmly, ignoring his interruption, 'is that I know I'd like working in the Infant Welfare Centre. And it would be good experience for me too, especially here. I know how go-ahead you are in Akersfield in these matters.'

A wide, satisfied smile spread over the Chairman's face. I've hit the target, Rose thought.

'We pride ourselves on it,' he admitted. 'We pride ourselves on it. Oh, there are those in the West Riding who are bigger than us, have the advantage of having started out sooner. We can't expect to compete with Bradford, though we've learnt from them. But we do our best, and our best is pretty good, eh gentlemen?'

He looked around for approval, which came in the shape of nods and grunts and murmurs of 'hear, hear' from the other members of the Committee. But Rose knew he spoke the truth. Akersfield's reputation in health matters was way ahead of most other towns of its size.

'But . . .' The Chairman was well into his stride now. '. . . in common with the rest of this land of ours, four years of bitter war have diverted our resources into other channels, like that of defending our shores, defeating the enemy. But that's all over now, praise God. It's nineteen twenty, and from now on things are going to get better and better. Me and my fellow Councillors will be proud to march ahead, leading Akersfield into a new and more prosperous age . . .'

His rhetoric was interrupted by the awkward man.

'I still say it's a waste of time and money, training women to be doctors! All they do is get married and have children. Money down the drain!'

But my father's money, not yours, Rose wanted to say. And he believes in me.

The Chairman, coming down to earth, took a gold hunter from his waistcoat pocket and looked at the time.

'Well, Doctor Stanton,' he said. 'As I'm sure you know, we still have one more applicant to interview. So now we'd like you to wait outside and we'll call you in again - if need be, that is. If need be.'

As Rose stood up the man on the Chairman's right gave her an encouraging smile. Leaving the room she tried to take the thought of that with her rather than the bland, non-

committal, or downright discouraging expressions on the faces of the other six members of the Committee.

The waiting room offered no comfort. It was a narrow room with a door at each end, and on one wall a high window which looked as if it had remained firmly closed since the town hall was erected. The window was glazed with opaque glass so that it was impossible to see the sky, even if that had not been obliterated by the November fog. Ugly yellow wooden chairs stood against two longer walls. Brown linoleum, scarred with cigarette burns, covered the floor. The room could have been specially designed, Rose thought, to subdue the spirits of whoever had to use it.

The other five candidates had ranged themselves around the room, leaving at least two chairs between themselves and the next person so that there would be no need to speak to each other. As Rose came in from the Committee room five pairs of eyes fixed themselves on her. She couldn't help but smile.

'No decision, gentlemen! I'm to wait until called for, like the rest of you.'

A young man of about her own age returned her smile. The rest, when the last one to be interviewed had gone into the Committee room, lowered their heads again. But they can't be worried about me, Rose told herself. I'm no threat. They're simply in competition with each other. The cards are stacked against me all right. How many of *them* have been told it's a rum occupation for them to follow? And if they happen to be married it's in their favour. She took a seat two empty chairs away from the man who had smiled at her. He leaned towards her and spoke.

'Would you like to look at my newspaper while we're waiting?' he asked. 'I've read it.'

'I'd be grateful,' Rose said.

The Akersfield *Record*. She unfolded it and looked at the first page. Sugar rationing was to end next Monday. Butter

was still in short supply and likely to continue expensive. She turned the pages. The weather would be unsettled and foggy and, of more immediate interest, they were advertising fur-trimmed velour cloth coats at four pounds ten shillings, which wasn't bad. If she got a job she would buy one. She had not had a new winter coat since the middle of the war.

But she couldn't think about that now. She couldn't concentrate. Her thoughts were all on the other side of that door. What would she do if she didn't get the job? Her hospital appointment finished at Christmas. All she had been offered so far was an assistant's job to a doctor in the better-class area of Akersfield, for three days a week. It was not residential and the money wouldn't be enough to keep her in food and lodgings, however meagre. Also, she didn't fancy it. Knowing the doctor - she had met him in the hospital - she was well aware that she'd be used as a dogsbody, as cheap labour, rolling pills, dispensing potions, kept well away from all the interesting cases which the doctor would claim as his own. In any case, she really wanted this job in the Welfare Centre. She was drawn to it. It was in the kind of neighbourhood - far from well-to-do - in which she wanted to work. She was sure she could make something of it.

She folded the newspaper and handed it back. 'Thank you,' she said. 'I'm afraid I can't take anything in just now. Too nervous, I expect!'

He grinned sympathetically. 'Aren't we all?'

She liked the look of him. If she didn't get the job herself then she hoped he would. She wondered about him. He looked too young, too untouched to have served in the war. The men who had been in France had the experience written in their faces, as if they saw life through different eyes. If she was not to work with women, then she would have liked to have used her skills as a doctor to help some of the men she saw around her all the time; in the streets, in

the hospitals, everywhere. There were many who would need help for a long time to come. They had a sickness of the heart and mind which was often worse than the wounds they had brought back in their bodies. But it was an area of medicine which was closed to her. As a woman she could not be expected to understand men.

All heads were raised as the door to the Committee room opened and the last candidate emerged. His expression was non-committal. No-one spoke as he sat down. Twenty minutes passed, each one of them an eternity, before the door opened again and a man came out. He looked around at the candidates and consulted the piece of paper he held. Rose felt her heart thumping so strongly in her chest that she was sure the others must hear it. She gripped her handbag tightly. Please God! Please God!

The man approached the candidates in turn, speaking quietly to each one. As she sat farthest away from him she would obviously be the last to know. She watched the others as, one after the other when the man had spoken to them, they rose to their feet and left. He was with the young man next to her now and she heard his words.

'Would you please go back into the Committee room, Doctor Cartwright.'

Disappointment engulfed Rose like a wave seeking to drown her. And as they said happened to a drowning person, all the hopes, fears, trials, difficulties she had gone through to reach this point came together before her. But she managed to smile at her neighbour as he set off for the Committee room.

'Congratulations!'

'Thanks,' he said.

She started to rise to her feet but the man with the list stood in front of her.

'No, you're not to go, Doctor Stanton. Will you wait for a moment or two and then go into the Committee room when Doctor Cartwright comes out?'

Oh well, it was something to have come second, she supposed. Not that it was any use to her. She wondered, in fact, whether she should bother to wait to receive the Committee's condolences. But she'd better do so in case she ever had to come before them again. There was the future to think about, however bleak it looked at the moment.

She didn't have to wait long. Doctor Cartwright soon emerged, still smiling, but not stopping to speak on his way out. A minute later she was back in the Committee room, sitting on the edge of the same large chair, waiting for the members to stop whispering to each other. Come on, she thought impatiently, get it over with!

'Thank you, gentlemen,' the Chairman said, bringing them to order. Then he looked at Rose.

'Well then, Doctor Stanton, we've all discussed your application very thoroughly, very carefully. It hasn't been easy. It's an important matter for us and, if I may say so, for Akersfield itself. The health of our Mothers and Children . . .'

Oh no, Rose thought! Spare me the speech! She couldn't bear it. Not now. She looked towards the man on the Chairman's right and as she did so he carefully lowered one eyelid in what amounted to a wink.

' . . . and the citizens of the future upon whom our town, nay, our country, will depend in the future as they have in the past . . .'

She stopped listening - and when the words came, the words which changed the world for her, it was as if she heard them from a great distance.

' . . . And so, Doctor Stanton - Doctor Rose Stanton as I suppose we shall have to learn to call you - we are pleased to offer you the post of Assistant Medical Officer in our Welfare Centre at a salary of three-hundred-and-seventy-five pounds per annum.'

She must pull herself together, quickly! She was going to faint, or burst into tears - and she mustn't because that was

exactly what the beast of a man who didn't approve of woman doctors was waiting for her to do! She looked at him and saw it in his face.

She took a deep breath. 'Thank you, gentlemen. Thank you very much. I'm grateful. I shall try to serve you well.'

'Not only us,' the Chairman said sententiously. 'Not only us, but Akersfield.'

This time she would have been prepared to listen to him, to let him have his fling, but it seemed he had almost finished.

'See the clerk before you go,' he said. 'There are one or two things for you to sign. And your appointment starts on the first of January 1921.'

'Thank you,' Rose said again. 'Thank you very much.'

As the Councillors gathered their papers together, preparing to leave, the clerk came towards her. While she was still answering his questions the nice man on the Chairman's right passed on his way out.

'Congratulations, Doctor Rose,' he said, and was gone. She hoped that wasn't the last she would see of him. She felt he'd been especially kind to her, that all along he'd been on her side.

The man standing by the far door of the waiting room watched Rose as she left the Committee room. He saw a small, slender woman, whom he supposed must be in her mid-twenties though she looked younger. She had a country complexion: clear, flawless skin tinged with pink, and a deeper flush of pink on her cheeks. The severity of her straight-brimmed felt hat fought - and lost - against the deep auburn hair which escaped in tendrils from under it: against the short, tilted nose, the gently-curving mouth which looked as though it had just finished smiling and might start again any minute. The tailored lines of her coat and skirt, which ended decorously a few inches above neat ankles, were softened by the red scarf she wore at her neck.

The fact that its colour shrieked against the auburn of her hair only added to the vibrancy which was exuded by her whole being.

She had not seen him as she crossed the room, her head held high, her face alight with happiness, but when he stepped in front of her, barring her way, she raised wide-set, slightly-puzzled green eyes to his. But the puzzlement could not hide the joy in her eyes.

Rose saw a man so tall that she had to tilt her head back to look at him. He must be more than six feet. He raised a fawn trilby, revealing crisp, fair hair. He had a thin, pale face and blue eyes which, meeting hers, were at one and the same time, humorous and serious. There was also, if she was not mistaken, a hint of admiration in them.

'I'm sorry,' she apologized. 'I wasn't looking where I was going.'

She had a pleasant voice too, he thought; clear and soft; a north country voice with its short vowels, but not from the West Riding.

'Don't apologize,' he said. 'I can see you have other things on your mind. Pleasant things, too, if I'm not mistaken.'

'Does it show so much? But you're quite right as it happens. It's turned out to be a special day for me.'

'I know,' he said. 'That's what I want to talk to you about.'

'You know? How can you? You weren't on the Committee were you?' He couldn't have been. She had studied the face of every single member. She would not have forgotten him.

'Were you one of the candidates?' she asked. 'If so . . .'

He took a card from his pocket and handed it to her. 'As it says there, Alex Bairstow, *Akersfield Record*. I'd be grateful for a few minutes of your time, Doctor Stanton.'

She looked genuinely puzzled now.

'How do you know?'

'I knew the interviews were taking place,' he said. 'I also knew there was a woman on the short list. It's my job to know things like that. Then I met Councillor Worthing, the

Deputy Chairman, as he was leaving, and he gave me the news. He seemed very pleased about it. Allow me to congratulate you, Doctor Stanton.'

Councillor Worthing? So he must be the man on the Chairman's right, the one she had known all along was on her side.

'I see,' she said. 'So you've come to cover me - like Births, Marriages and Deaths?'

He smiled. He had a particularly nice smile. It widened his already generous mouth and brightened his eyes.

'Not quite! I used to do that when I was a cub reporter, before the war. At this time of the year I attended funerals most days of the week. Since I returned I've been promoted. No more Hatches, Matches and Despatches, not even chapel bunfights. I go after stories. You know the kind of thing? Local boy makes good, or preferably, for our readers, goes to the bad! The human element, especially if it's controversial.'

There was a sharp edge to his voice, as if he didn't quite take himself seriously. And yet he does, Rose thought. I'm sure he does.

'And I'm controversial?' she queried.

'I'm sure you know you are. But you were at the interview, I wasn't. I'd be delighted to hear that it was one hundred per cent in your favour but I'm not sure that I'd believe you.'

The clerk came and interrupted them.

'I'm sorry, Doctor Stanton, Mr Bairstow. I have to lock up these rooms now.'

'Right, Tom, we're moving,' Alex Bairstow said.

Rose walked with him down the wide staircase into the lobby of the town hall.

'We can't break off the conversation at this point,' Alex Bairstow said. 'And I'm sure you don't want to continue it in the town hall entrance. Will you let me buy you a cup of tea? To celebrate. There's a café quite close by.'

‘Honestly,’ Rose said, laughing. ‘There’s not much to know about me. I’d be taking your tea under false pretences.’

‘I’ll be the judge of that,’ he said. ‘Let’s go.’

Outside the town hall’s impressively pillared entrance he tucked his hand under her elbow and guided her across Market Street and through a labyrinth of narrow back streets to a small basement café, halfway up a steep hill. He walked with long, easy strides and Rose had difficulty in keeping up with him.

‘I always have toasted currant teacake with my cup of tea,’ he said when they were seated. ‘Would you like one?’

‘I’m really not sure what I’m doing here,’ Rose said. ‘But since I *am* here – yes please. I miss my mother’s teacakes.’

‘But these are very good,’ she admitted a few moments later.

‘You were trying to tell me you weren’t controversial,’ Alex Bairstow said. ‘Well maybe *you* aren’t – I haven’t decided about that – but you must know your appointment is. Five men short-listed and they pick a woman! The first woman doctor we’ve had in the town, let alone working for the Council. So tell me how did the interview go?’

‘I don’t propose to tell you that,’ Rose said sharply. ‘The interview was confidential, as you must very well know.’

‘All right I’ll tell you,’ he said. ‘I’ve sat in on enough Council meetings to know. Councillor Worthing would be for you. He’s a fair-minded, enlightened sort of chap, and what’s more he likes women, especially pretty ones. Councillor Thwaites – he’s the Chairman – would sound off about the glories of Akersfield and his part in its making. Councillor Patterson wouldn’t hear half that went on and Councillor Rogers would be against you. I daresay he told you that a woman’s place is in the home?’

‘More or less,’ Rose admitted. ‘It’s what most men say. I’m used to it. I daresay it’s what you tell your wife.’

‘I haven’t got a wife,’ he said. ‘I suppose I haven’t really got a home. I live in digs. And I know you’re not married or

you'd never have got as far as the interview.'

'The Chairman said, "Are you courting?"' Rose giggled at the memory.

'And are you?'

'Not really.'

'Ah! Then there's someone?'

'Yes and no,' she said thoughtfully. 'And please don't write that down and use it.'

'I won't,' he assured her. 'It isn't part of my plan to make things more difficult for you. Besides, you don't sound very sure, and I like to get my facts right. When do you start the job?'

'In the New Year.'

'And what are you going to do between now and then?'

'Well,' Rose said, 'I shall be working in hospital up to Christmas. Also I'll have to look for lodgings. You can put that in your paragraph if you like. Someone might make me an offer. I'll probably go home for Christmas. Home is Faverwell. My parents keep a pub there and they can always do with extra help at Christmas. Anyway, you've no idea how beautiful the Dales can be at Christmas.'

'Oh yes I have,' he contradicted. 'Before we went to France my Company was stationed in Swaledale. I'd have been glad to have stayed there.'

'Did you have a bad war?'

'Are there any good ones, then? But mine was better than some. As you see, I'm here, and all in one piece. And I've got a job, which is more than can be said for some. Was your friend about whom you're not sure in the Army?'

'No,' Rose answered. 'He's a vet. The only one for miles around so he was needed on the farms. But he looked after army horses sometimes, when they were stationed nearby.'

'I see. Well, Doctor Stanton - by the way, has anyone told you that your boss's name is Stanton?'

'Yes,' she said. 'I've settled for Doctor Rose.'

‘Doctor Rose. Nice. Can I quote that? The human touch that endears itself to our readers.’ His voice was mocking. ‘Now if I could also say that you’re fond of animals that would go down really well.’

Rose flushed.

‘It’s your idea to write something about me, not mine. It makes no difference to me.’

‘Ah but it could, you know. Never underestimate the power of the press, Doctor Rose, either for you or against. But don’t worry, the editor won’t give this item undue importance. It’s not front page stuff.’

‘I’m sorry,’ Rose said. ‘But if I decide to rob a bank or murder Councillor Rogers, I’ll be sure to let you know.’

She had thought at first that she quite liked Mr Bairstow. Now she was not so sure. He was too cocky by half, too full of his own importance. But what did he matter anyway? She’d got the job. That was all that mattered. Everything would be good from now on.

Alex Bairstow was grinning at her.

‘Thanks,’ he said. ‘I’d appreciate that.’

Chapter Two

WHEN THE TRAIN drew into Grassington station Rose's brother-in-law, Christopher, was there to meet her. As she stepped down from the carriage he took her case from her.

'Whatever have you got in it?' he asked. 'It feels heavy enough for gold brick. How long are you here for?'

'Would it were gold bricks,' Rose replied. 'Warm clothes and Christmas presents mostly. And I'm here until almost the end of December. How are you?'

To her eyes Christopher always looked the same. No different now, at thirty, from ten years ago when he had married her sister. But since they had all known each other since they were children he had never changed in her eyes and she supposed he never would. He was tall, broad-shouldered, with the ruddy complexion of someone who had spent most of his life out of doors. His features were well put together but unremarkable.

'Can't complain,' he replied. 'And you? We were pleased to hear about the job.'

'Isn't it wonderful,' Rose said. 'I was so lucky.'

She followed him out of the station to where his Morris car stood by the kerb.

'It's good of you to meet me,' she said. 'I wasn't at all sure there'd be a bus and I didn't fancy walking all those miles. I've done it often enough, goodness knows; but Christmas Eve isn't the time.'

It was raining as they left the station; a thin, mean sleetish rain. Outside the village Christopher turned the car down the hill towards the river, then north on to the narrow road which led to Faverwell, seven miles up the dale. In an hour or so it would be dark, but as yet there was still some

light in the cold, grey sky. It was a sky which promised snow to come. And true to its promise, after two miles or so of the twisting road, which followed closely the bends and curves of the river, the rain turned to snow, falling in soft, thick flakes.

Rose, not speaking - one of the nice things about Christopher was that you could enjoy a comfortable silence with him - watched it settle on the high green fells which rose on each side of them. It began to mark out the tops of the grey limestone walls, walls which climbed to the summits, now going straight, now diverting to form fields of strange geometrical shapes. When, in Leeds or Akersfield, Rose thought of home, it was the whitish-grey walls running up the hillsides which she pictured.

'I'd hoped it was going to be a white Christmas,' she said. 'It seems so right.'

'Shows you're not a farmer,' Christopher said.

'I know. Still I *am* a daleswoman, so I should know better. But it does look so very beautiful.'

'Well we've got all the sheep down from the tops, so I'm not too worried,' Christopher said. 'At least there's no wind to speak of, so it won't drift.'

'How's the farm been this year?' Rose enquired.

'Not too good. Sheep are fetching a poor price. I wish I knew some other way of making a living but farming's in my blood. The Bishops have been at Fellside as long as the Stantons have kept the Ewe Lamb. It takes someone like you to break away.'

'But I'm not breaking away,' Rose protested. 'It's simply that I can't do my job here. But however far away I go I shall always come back. I'm sure of that.'

'Anyway it's good to have you back for Christmas,' Christopher said. 'Emily will enjoy it, not to mention your Ma and Pa. She gets a bit down, Emily does. And when she's down she gets to thinking about Robert. Not that I don't

think about him as well, you understand; but having the farm to think about helps me.'

Robert was their only son. He had died two years ago, aged five, from diphtheria; by coincidence at a time when every small diphtheria patient she saw there reminded her sharply of her nephew. Christopher and Emily had two other children, Helen, who was nine years old and fourteen-year-old Kitty; but Rose suspected that Robert had always been the most deeply loved.

'I understand,' Rose said. 'Or at least I try to. But some members of the Health Committee, when I had my interview, seemed to think it was impossible to understand something if you hadn't experienced it.'

'I daresay someone like you can understand a lot,' Christopher said thoughtfully. 'And you can sympathize. But you can't know what it feels like unless you've gone through it.'

'Do you think that applies to something like marriage, or giving birth?' Rose asked.

'I think so,' Christopher said.

They could see Faverwell now. The winter afternoon was closing in and the lights were showing in the cottages and on the farms.

'I'll drop you at the Ewe Lamb,' Christopher said. 'I'll not come in. I've got jobs to do, and being Christmas Eve Emily'll want to get the children off to bed in good time.'

'When shall we see you?' Rose asked.

'Tomorrow for dinner. After the Ewe's closed. Your Ma and Pa aren't opening up in the evening.'

'I know,' Rose said. 'It's about the only evening they have off together in the year. Well I'll see what help Mother needs, and if there's time tell Emily I'll walk over in the morning.'

When Christopher drove away, it being not yet opening time and the front door of the Ewe Lamb being locked, Rose went around to the back. Before she could raise a hand to

the door knob her father was there, his eyes bright with welcome, his thin face creased in a smile.

'My word, lass, it's good to see thee! Tha's a sight for sore eyes, an' no mistake!'

It was a measure of his excitement that he spoke in the dialect. It was not his usual way, though he could speak it with the best of them, and did so when the occasion called for it, and always when he was moved or excited.

'It's good to see you, Father,' Rose said.

They embraced warmly. He was alight with happiness, Rose thought, and marvelled that once again her homecoming could do this to him.

'Where's Mother?' she asked.

'She's around at the church, giving a hand with the decorations. You'd think she had enough to do without that, wouldn't you? She's been up since five this morning. She'd have been here, only we didn't expect you quite so soon.'

'It was kind of Christopher to meet me,' Rose said.

The kitchen door opened and her mother, bringing a flurry of snow with her, entered.

'Coming down fast now,' she said. 'Somebody'll have to clear that path up to the church or it'll be real slippy for early service.'

It was her mother's way, Rose knew, not to show outward emotion. She was quite unlike her husband in that. She took off her gloves, scarf, coat and hat, placed the gloves in the dresser drawer, put the pins from her hat in a small vase on the mantelpiece, hung her coat behind the door and put her hat on the dresser before she turned to speak directly to Rose.

'Well then, Our Rose?'

'Well then, Mother. How are you?' Rose leaned forward to kiss her mother but Clara Stanton, as if by accident, turned away, so that the kiss landed only lightly on the edge of her cheek. She seemed unable to show affection, though Rose knew that it was in her. As a child she had longed to have a

mother who would kiss and cuddle her, like the mothers of her friends. She had determined at an early age that when she grew up and had children she would hug and kiss them a lot. They would never have to wonder about her love for them.

‘Have you put the kettle on, then, George?’ Mrs Stanton asked. ‘I daresay we could all do with a cup of tea.’

‘Meanwhile,’ Rose said. ‘I’ll take my case upstairs and unpack. After that I’m ready to give a hand with anything you want me to do.’

‘No call for you to start working. You haven’t come back to work,’ Mrs Stanton said. She was getting out cups and saucers. The best china, Rose noted; delicately thin, gilt-handles, decorated with pink roses. She should have felt complimented but she was not. The sight of the flowery china on the embroidered linen cloth saddened her.

‘I’ve come because it’s my home. I wanted to come. I wanted to be with you and Father and the rest of the family.’

She put out a hand and touched the back of her mother’s hand as she arranged the cups. ‘I’m not a visitor, Mother. Please don’t treat me like one. The kitchen cups are good enough for me.’

‘Well . . .’ Mrs Stanton hesitated. ‘Well you *are* a doctor!’

‘I’m your daughter, same as I always was. But all right, just this once to celebrate we’re together. After that don’t you dare!’

She went upstairs to unpack. She had slept in this room, with its small window overlooking the beck which ran down to join the river, ever since she could remember, sharing it with Emily until her sister left home to marry. Every night of her childhood she had fallen asleep to the sound of rushing water, for even in the hottest summer the beck never ran dry. When she had first gone to Medical School she had returned home every weekend that she could find the return fare from Leeds, but a few months later she had become so involved in this and that Society in the university, in