

My
SCOTTIE *The Portrait of a
Well-Loved Dog*

By Mazo de la Roche

Illustrated by José Segrelles

*** A Distributed Proofreaders Canada eBook ***

This eBook is made available at no cost and with very few restrictions. These restrictions apply only if (1) you make a change in the eBook (other than alteration for different display devices), or (2) you are making commercial use of the eBook. If either of these conditions applies, please contact a <https://www.fadedpage.com> administrator before proceeding. Thousands more FREE eBooks are available at <https://www.fadedpage.com>.

This work is in the Canadian public domain, but may be under copyright in some countries. If you live outside Canada, check your country's copyright laws. IF THE BOOK IS UNDER COPYRIGHT IN YOUR COUNTRY, DO NOT DOWNLOAD OR REDISTRIBUTE THIS FILE.

Title: My Scottie

Date of first publication: 1930

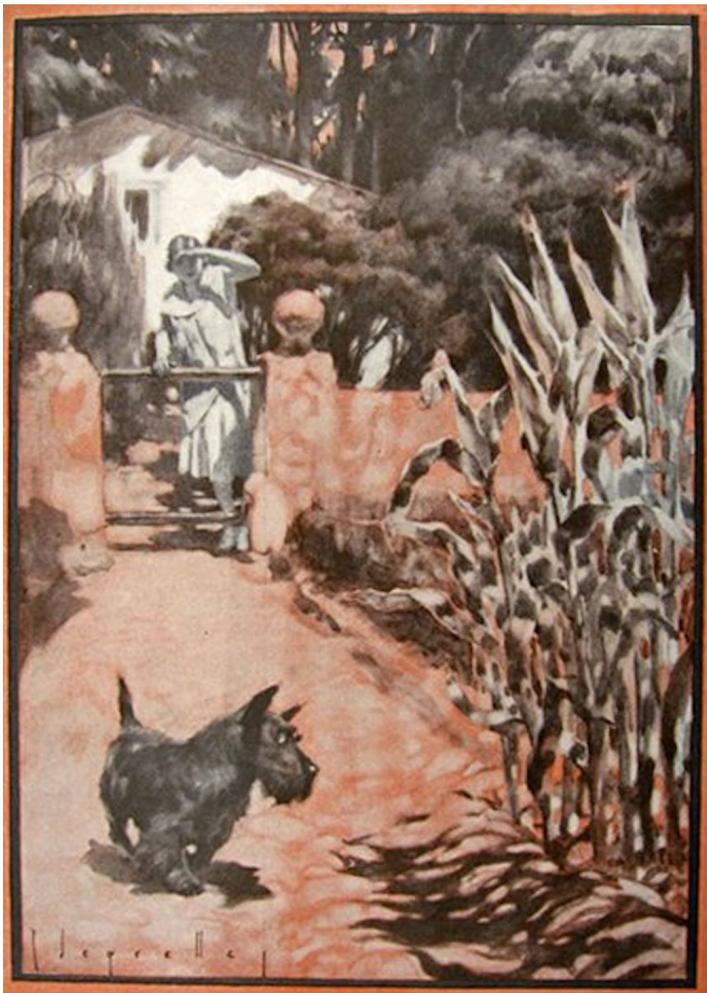
Author: Mazo de la Roche (1879-1961)

Date first posted: Nov. 13, 2020

Date last updated: Nov. 13, 2020

Faded Page eBook #20201126

This eBook was produced by: Mardi Desjardins, John Routh & the online Distributed Proofreaders Canada team at <https://www.pgdpCanada.net>



You stood on the edge of the cornfield that rose before you like a great, whispering wood. You had never seen anything like this before. It bent and rose and bent again and threw running shadows on the warm earth beneath.

My
SCOTTIE *The Portrait of a
Well-Loved Dog*

By Mazo de la Roche

Illustrated by José Segrelles

It is not easy, here in Devon, to picture the scene which was the setting for my first sight of you. Between it and me the lovely Devon landscape rises, a green and sunlit barrier. The thick, rounded clumps of trees, the hedges outlining the curious shapes of the fields, Dartmoor itself rising darkly to High Willhays—all shut me in from that far-off place. The song of the finch, the scent of the moss-rose, shut me in.

I close my eyes, put my hand across my forehead, and press my thumb and middle finger against my temples. The red, plowed fields, fields of shining barley, of silvery oats, of fine, fair wheat, are darkened. For a space I still hear the bird song, smell the sweet garden scents, then they, too, fade; and slowly, against the darkness, I find the place I am looking for.

I see the gray sky of winter, the square, stubborn house facing the gray waters of the lake into which slow snowflakes fall and disappear. The land sleeps under its covering of snow.

It is Christmas. There is a holly wreath upon the door; green club-moss and boughs of balsam are above the pictures and the square, small-paned windows. The resinous smell of the boughs, the smell of a pine knot burning, have given us a strange feeling of gaiety, made us forget the shadow that hangs over the house.

We are gathered about you, standing on your uncertain puppy legs in the middle of the room, staring up at the faces surrounding you.

You were courageous then, as always. Pathetically small and soft and round, you stared up at us who must have seemed beings of formidable proportions to you, terrifying, one would think, after the snugness of your kennel, with your brothers and sisters all about you and your mother's side looming warm and protective between you and the world. Yet you turned up your little muzzle, looked from one to another of us out of velvety dark eyes, and, when a saucer of warm milk was set before you, you plunged your nose

into it nor raised it again until the last drop was gone and your eager tongue propelled the empty saucer across the floor.

After the milk you looked even rounder than before, more intrepid, your tail took on a cocky curve, again you raised your muzzle and surveyed us. Each bent toward you with an outstretched, coaxing hand, each longing to feel the baby plumpness of your body. Your nose was wet, a drop of milk hung on your chin, your eyes shone. You looked at us half timidly, half roguishly. There was no fear in you. Then, with a little kick of the hind legs that nearly sent you over, you trotted straight into the hands of the one who was to be your master. Laughing, he picked you up, laid you against the broadness of his chest, and bent his head to you. You were my Christmas present to him, the last Christmas present he was ever to get. . . .

Lizzie, the maid, predicting a night of wails, put you in your basket by the kitchen fire for the night. No one thought about you until the next morning, for you never uttered a sound. Then, as always, you were ready to accommodate yourself, make the best of things.

In the morning, when I took you from your bed, you came soft and yielding, yawning to show the whiteness of your teeth, rolling your eyes to show their brightness, romping into the set and sad life of the house.

You gave Lizzie endless trouble. Every naughty trick that puppies have you had, and it seemed that we should never get you house-broken. The furniture was shabby, and gnawings of walnut legs did not much upset us, but we were proud of our fine old rugs, and you were invariably smacked when Lizzie came running with a great cloth to sop the wet spot up. One day, when the smacking had been unusually hard, you went crestfallen into a corner and sat there for a space. And, when the next mishap came, which was all too soon, you galloped with flying ears and tail to the scullery, snatched up the cloth, dragged it with difficulty, and yet with pride in the achievement, back to the very spot of your disgrace. That time there was no smacking.

Just when we had decided that you were incorrigible, you seemed to say to yourself, "Enough of such infantile behavior," and from that time your habits were of spartan cleanliness.

How you throve that winter! Everything agreed with you, and you agreed with everything. It was great fun, you thought, to chase the big gray cat Christopher the length of the drawing room, the hall, the dining room, until at last he leaped, with glowing eyes, to his own special chair, out of your reach. Meanwhile you raged below, running about the chair legs in a

convulsion of baffled barking. He was beyond your reach. You could not even climb to the top of the leather-covered footstool. You would cling to its side like a limpet, rolling your eyes in mingled hope and despair till you dropped back to the floor.

Then at last a day came when you clambered to the top and sat there, the picture of comical surprise at your own achievement.

After that came the conquest of Christopher's chair. He no longer had any refuge from you except on the shoulder of one of us or on Lizzie's lap.

I carried you to the stable and showed you the horses. You were not at all impressed by their size and tried to jump out of my arms into their mangers, sniffed at each long, velvety nose, and even when Mollie, the chestnut, drew up her lip and showed her teeth at you, you only wriggled with delight. There seemed no end to your hardihood. Ten score of hens fluttering and screaming about you, a great turkey cock circling with stiffened wings and wattles red as fire, were nothing but a joke. Your one concern was how you should chase them all at once.

It was a beautiful spring. The ice broke in the stream, and it tumbled coffee-colored, with a roaring sound, into the brightness of the lake. The lake seemed never still. It moved with small, eager waves under the sun and stars . . . The earth stirred early and sent up vigorous green shoots. And then the summer came—your first summer.

You stood on the edge of the cornfield that rose before you like a great, whispering wood. It bent under the breeze, now this way, now that, as the breeze scurried. It bent and rose and bent again and threw running shadows on the warm earth beneath. You had never seen anything like this before. You gave me a puzzled, questioning look, and I reassured you by a pat. You trotted into the corn, looking very small, broke into a run, dashed off at an angle, and were lost to sight. I called your name, whistled, but you did not answer. You were never very obedient when about important business of your own. The blackbirds, robins, and finches darted here and there above the corn as though looking for you. But you were lost in that billowy green sea.

It was night when you came out, exhausted but happy, your sides almost touching with hunger. You came out in a rowdy, headlong gallop straight to the door and barked to have it opened. With me I carried a brown bowl of bread and milk and set it on the grass before you. It was new milk, and you put your muzzle into it, eagerly drawing up the bits of bread with a convulsive movement of your sides. You did not pause until the bowl was

emptied, then you licked round and round it for every possible crumb, moving it along the grass before you. It turned upside down, and you licked the bottom, then looked up at me with an air of triumph as though now you knew what life meant—a hunt, great perils met and overcome, hunger, repletion, and rest. You raised yourself feebly on your hind legs and lifted two wobbly forepaws to be taken up.

Every morning for a week you disappeared into the cornfield and stayed all day, missing your dinner, returning at almost the same moment each evening with the same loud cry for supper.

Then one day it seemed that you had exhausted it or that other urgent business pressed upon you. You made the round of the lawn, the shrubbery, the plantation of oaks, the grass-grown orchard. You sought out neighbors who kept guinea fowls, and for almost a week you appeared before me each noon with a guinea hen's egg in your mouth, which you laid unbroken at my feet. What was I supposed to do with it? Was it for my lunch? How did you know that it was of value? Yet you did know, for there was a canny Scotch twinkle in your eye as you laid it there.

As the summer advanced, you became less of the puppy at play and more of the companion. We began to take long walks together. At sundown I would take you to the lake. You learned to retrieve and took to the water like a spaniel. It could not be too cold nor too rough for you. You would venture out in waves that must have seemed mountains to you, and I can see you now with one end of a great rough stick in your jaws (for sometimes, to try you, I chose the roughest and largest I could find) paddling away, never giving up, till it lay on the beach. From your strong black muzzle to the tip of your “gay” tail, you were game!

Those were fine walks back to the house at sundown through the clover field and through the orchard. You would dart here and there, following the scents that the dew brought from the earth, scents of strange burrows and small fugitives I could not see. You would stop at the grass plot where you had your supper and give a hopeful lick or two at your empty bowl before we entered the house.

There, in the drawing room, a wood fire blazed on the hearth. Your master sat there, his head outlined against the brightness. You went to him and put your paws on his knee, and he played with your ears. “Little dog, little dog!” You lay down before the fire, your chin on his foot, and slept. . . .

It was over. Tragedy had found us, passed over us as a storm. We three who were left were prostrate in spirit, as the corn lay prostrate after a storm of wind and hail.

Lemon lilies were like gold flung out in the grass, growing wild and uncared-for. The rich solemnity of midsummer lay on the land and on the lake. There was an unfathomable seriousness in your mien as you trotted about after me. It was clear that you were quite conscious of a change in the aspect of our lives, that you felt the absence of your master. In the evening we now avoided the room where we had sat about the fire together, choosing instead a small upstairs room against the one window of which a great cedar tree pressed, throwing all within into a greeny shade by day and seeming to hold the moon in its boughs by night.

One night, as the three of us sat together, we missed you, and I went downstairs to find you. From room to room I looked and at last pushed wide open the tall white door and went into that room. All was clear in the moonlight, all reflected in the long gilt-framed mirror. Even you, small, black, pathetic in your loneliness, were reflected sitting by his chair. What need had brought you there? A longing, perhaps, for that courageous masculine presence, perhaps a consciousness of some essence in the room of which I was not sensible. I sat down in the chair and took you on my knees. And so we mourned together. . . .

We had returned to the city whence we had come, and taken a small house. It was a cold winter, but you were always busy. You had an old bedroom slipper (it was new when you took it for your own) that was a constant source of pleasurable excitement to you. It was a cat, and you worried it. It was a rat, and you threw it up and caught it. It was a rabbit, and you rolled on it, smashing it, growling while it lay quiet, giving convulsive kicks of your hind-quarters. You turned your back on it, swaggered away from it with waving tail, wheeled, pounced on it again, with a yell of triumph snatched it up and beat yourself violently about the head with it.

Twice a day you and I had our tramp together. Down through the park, across the icy, open spaces, you sped shouting after thrown sticks. Slithering, sliding, prancing, you filled the frosty air with your joy in the game. When a heavy snowfall came, you plunged into the white drifts like a swimmer into the sea and came out looking so ridiculous that every one who saw you smiled. You made friends with everybody. You sat up in the middle of shops waving your paws, you sat up to babies asking for their sugar sticks, you sat up to organ-grinders asking for dear knows what!

In the evening it was your special treat to sit on the table in the living room among the sewing and the open books, overseeing all. You did your best to understand our life and to take part in it, to give out your staunch spirit to us and to draw us closer to you. . . .

It was spring again. We had taken a cottage on a northern lake for the season, and the house was pervaded by the excitement of preparation. You ran here and there, urging us on, clambering into half-packed boxes in the attic, tumbling down two flights of stairs to rage at the knock of a peddler.

We arrived at the cottage in the twilight, and there was a heated discussion as to whether or not you should be allowed out that night.

“We shall never see her again!” said one.

“We shall have a pretty night, tired as we are, worrying over her.”

“But she *must* go out sometime,” I protested. “It may as well be now.”

I met only opposition, and all the while your bright eyes implored me. You knew I was on your side, and, when the others left the room, you stayed behind with me.

Gently I opened the door; slinking, I slid through it, a little black dog, fairy-like in her tread, close at my heels. We were in the broad meadow that stretched between the cottage and the farmer’s house. Behind us the twilight fields rose to the wood silhouetted against the sky. Before us, through an opening in the cedars, we saw the lake navy blue below the ruddy glare of sunset. After the city the air felt indescribably fresh and sweet. Cool evening smells rose from the fields, lively with the virgin vigor of May. Little cold waves talked together against the stones, a cow lowed, and the last swallow found his nest.

We went to the water’s edge, and you drank thirstily. Then, suddenly, like an arrow, you sped into the twilight, never faltering, never swerving, up from the shore, back through the fields, into the enticing night of the wood.

Back in the cottage I admitted faintly that you were gone and that God alone knew where.

It was black night. No, it was worse than that, for gray dawn had drawn a finger across the windowpane, when trotting feet on the veranda sent a tremor along the floor of my room. I heard an impatient whine, an eager snuffle under the door, and I jumped out of bed and let you in. There was

nothing abashed in your entrance. You had gone wild for the night and were not ashamed. You drank with extravagant haste from your water dish and threw yourself on the bare boards of your little room without heed for comfort. I returned to my bed justified. I had been sure you would come back.

The next morning the new life began in brave earnest. You gobbled your porridge and milk and then grinned up at me. When you grinned, you showed your lower teeth, your jaw thrust out, which gave your face an expression of almost ribald merriment.

Day after day the new life went on, unfolding fresh joys for you. Food mattered nothing, nor home, nor love of us, only the chase, the penetrating of burrows, the return to the life for which your sires had been bred. But at sunset you came home, a weary little dog, ready to be stroked, to be held on comfortable laps, to submit to the pulling out of burrs.

It was a hot June, and when we reached July the heat grew torrid. We lived in and out of the water. To swim beside us filled you with gladness. Your sleek little head like a seal's bobbed up and down in the waves.

The weather grew insufferable. Hot night succeeded torrid day.

One night I could not sleep. I got up in the light of the sinking moon and went out of doors. There had been a dew, and the coolness of moist grass was pleasant to bare feet. A deep stillness lay on the lake and the trees, but a movement, palpable as a light breeze, rose from the earth. I went around to your room and looked in at the window. I thought it must be very hot in there for you, under the sloping roof. You had got on to a large rocking chair which we had put in there because we disliked it, and were rocking yourself gently, seeming to express the thought,

“Well, as I can not sleep, this will help to pass the time.”

In an instant you had discovered me and were at the window, tearing at the screen, whining the distressfulness of your situation. I pulled out the screen and lifted you over the sill, receiving a swift lick of gratitude in the passing.

We were like beings transformed out in the night together. We ran and leaped in the meadow. We went to the lake, and you drank, while I plunged my arms into its coolness. You scrambled over the rocks after a water rat, while I squatted listening to the sweet awakening of the first bird and saw the moon disappear. . . .

The next summer I went on a long visit.

On my return the first moments were given to my family, and I had barely time to notice your exquisite delight at having me back again. You uttered little cries that were painful. The fullness of your heart seemed almost too much for even your sturdy little body. But we were alone together at last, and I took you on my knee and stroked you and looked into your eyes.

I was startled at seeing that they were running, those eyes that had always been of a beautiful clearness. A feeling of apprehension shadowed my homecoming for me.

When I took you to the veterinary, he said,

“Why, I must tell you that this little dog is more than half blind!”

He passed his hand quickly before your eyes. You raised your face wistfully to his.

We were walking on a busy street. You trotted close beside me, as though to gain confidence from my nearness. You walked with a peculiar, uncertain lightness, as though the earth no longer felt solid beneath you. A lorry thundered by, and you shrank at the end of the lead, straining to escape from the sudden terror. We came to the crossing which so often you had traversed with an air that said: “The policeman has held up his hand for me. The traffic has been stopped for me.” Now you hopped down from the curb with a queer little jolt, then turned round and faced the other way, straining to return home. I picked you up and carried you in my arms. How gladly you threw yourself against my shoulder, and I felt the thudding of your tail on my side.

Soon after that one of us was taken ill. She had come home from the house of a friend, tired and feverish. She went to bed, and I sat by the window waiting for the other one, who had also been out, to return. The sun was setting, and the snow, of which there had been a fresh fall that day, was flushed pink upon its fairness. The shadows were intense and blue. She came down the street a slender, erect figure in black furs. The fairness of her clear-cut face was flushed pink like the snow. When she came in, I told her the ill news, and her blue eyes became dark with concern, for there was an epidemic in the country.

It was scarcely three days before we others were taken ill. It was scarcely three weeks before the one with the dark blue eyes had gone from

us. . . . I lay on a couch convalescent. You had got up beside me and were sitting very close to me. I put out my hand and found a match on the little table where there were things for smoking. I struck it and held it close to your eyes. You did not flinch. You drew nearer, sniffing. I threw away the match and gathered you close. Ah, how you pressed against me! In the quietness we sat together facing the new life. You were in physical darkness, my darkness was spiritual. A sympathy deeper than that of look or speech passed between us.

In June I took you to New York with me.

In the intervening time you had miraculously recovered your courage. For a while it had failed you, when you were cut off from the light, when you could no longer see the pageant of moving things that stirred you to anger or delight, when you must face a long dark corridor of days swept by the winds of the unknown.

But now your courage had come back to you, and with its coming self-confidence grew day by day.

It almost seemed as though zest were added to certain of your activities. In your play with your old shoe, for instance, a new ferocity was added. You would worry it till it seemed that it must fly to pieces. You would growl deeply at it, as though you said: "Me afraid? Never! And I'll show this old shoe . . ."

Your re-establishment in life was complete. To any one who knew you, overbrimming with health as you were, the idea of putting you away because you could not see would have appeared an act of stupid cruelty.

Every day your hearing became more sensitive. The minutest sound that had any bearing on your daily routine became significant to you. If I opened a certain drawer and took out my purse, you were at my side in an instant. You knew that that sound portended marketing and its delights. The butcher's and the bone bought for you. The bakeshop where you had only to sit up, waving your paws, and a little sweet cake would be put before you. The grocer's and the evil converse with his great gray cat. Best of all, the fishmonger's!

But there was a new wistfulness in you. Now you needed reassurance, desired approval. Before you would romp with your shoe you must walk up and down between the two of us, displaying your victim to each in turn before you tortured it.

We had bought a piece of woodland where once had stood the primeval pine forest. That had been cut down long ago, and in its place had grown up straight young oaks, graceful maples, poplars, and silver birches, the gleaming trunks of which gave the place a mysterious, fairy beauty. This was your happy hunting-ground for the rest of your life. We built a cottage there for the summers, and, as the doors stood always open, you had the joy of going in and out and up and down at will.

You were very happy. If you thought about it you doubtless thought that life there would go on forever, in earthy, grassy, sun-warmed monotony, offering you the sounds and scents you loved to follow. You learned to know every foot of the wood. You made your own intricate paths between burrow and burrow, and they all led at last to the seclusion of the ravine where you buried your favorite bones.

No matter how lovely the morning, you stuck by me indoors while I worked. I worked long and hard, and you lay, muzzle on paws, at my feet. Sometimes I would plead with you,

“Run along out and catch a rabbit!”

But though you quivered at the words, you would not budge. Your fealty to the cause of my work was not to be shaken. Short stories, plays, novels, reviewing—all must be done under your supervision. To lay down the pencil and stroke your back was better than a dozen books of reference. I can see the huge old Johnson’s Dictionary in two volumes, lying beside you on the floor. I heave one up, looking for a word. It is the wrong volume, of course, and must be exchanged for the other. But nothing I do with them has any effect on you until they are replaced, with a bang, on the bookcase. Then you rise, stretch, yawn, showing your red curled tongue and white teeth. You talk to me a little, gruff growling encouragements to make haste for the sun is high and the woods are sweet.

Your last summer we spent at the seaside on the Massachusetts coast. You could not understand the sea. You were used to lakes and little streams, but this was a horse of another color. It was exciting, but it was baffling. You rocked along the smooth sands with a lobster claw sticking out of your mouth. You sniffed the jellyfish, dug holes and buried the starfish. You behaved like a puppy. What baffled you was that you could not quench your thirst at it. You drank and drank, raised your head, smacked your lips, slobbered. Then, planting your feet wide apart, you set to work to drink the ocean up. Your attitude said, “I will quench my thirst or know the

reason why!” But it could not be done. A wave came and drenched you. You retreated, a little rueful, and then and there threw up the briny water on the sand. We were not sentimental about you. I think we laughed at you a good deal, but how we appreciated your indomitable spirit and how we loved you!

Almost every day we took a picnic to the shore. After the first day you led the way, and people smiled to see your air of consequence, little guessing that you could not see. Our wraps were thrown on the hot sand. The picnic basket, the thermos bottle, all our belongings mounded beside them. We raced across the bright strip of beach into the surf, but you did not race with us. More important and more pleasurable was your occupation. You sat beside the lunch basket guarding its contents. You might sniff around its brim, inhaling the delicious odor of the tuna fish sandwiches, but, though you knew your own sandwich was inside, you would have starved rather than touch it. It was an unlucky dog that drew near that sacred mound of our belongings. You would fly at him like a fury and, having driven him off and more than likely bitten him, return to your post.

Oh, your joy when we came dripping back to you! The lunch was spread out. What was yours was inside you in a trice, and a good deal of what was ours was given you bit by bit. The sun blazed on us, turning us the color of copper.

On the shore you picked up something poisonous and would have died but for the skill of the New England veterinary. The first time he came, I did not like him. He seemed dour after our genial Vet. But when one got to know him, how gentle, how understanding of animals!

“Do you think,” I asked, “that she may get better?”

“In three days,” he drawled, “there will be either a rejoicing or a funeral here.”

There was a rejoicing! Through all that dreadful suffering you came, weak but incredibly tenacious of life. It was a fortnight before you were able to go for a walk.

You had one week of freedom in your own wood before returning to town. It was a week of sheer happiness. The weather was golden October, and every morning Jacob, the gardener, made a fresh bonfire of brushwood and dead leaves. The air was full of the acrid smell of wood smoke. Bushes were heavy with sweet, over-ripe blackberries. A few birds had forgotten to leave us and sang dreamily in the reddening trees. No frost had come to

spoil our garden. Asters, Michaelmas daisies, nasturtiums, and marigolds flamed for us. The grass of the lawn was a rich green that caught and held the shadows like deep water. You lay on it with raised head, delicately sniffing the various scents that pleased you. You were out early in the morning, sitting on a sunny knoll, for at that hour it was cold. You were out late at night prowling among the mysteries of the silver birches in the moonlight. Your expression was one of bliss. You lived in a dream of happiness.

You died at Christmas. . . . Some poison from that other sickness must have remained in you and returned swiftly, without warning, to set your brain afire. You might be saved, the doctor said, if kept quiet and inactive for some weeks. He took you to his hospital.

You were returned to us on Christmas morning, supposedly cured. Cured! Why, you were like a live wire. Your joy at being with us was past bearing. Your excitement at being in your home again was past bearing. All, all, was past bearing. It could not be borne. You raised your muzzle toward the lighted Christmas candles and uttered a deep cry, a bay, musical and full of despair.

I took you for a walk, and you were beside yourself with excitement in the snow. I brought you home and left you with the other one while I went out again. When I came back I found that she had had a bad time with you. She had given you tablets from the doctor to quiet you, but nothing would quiet you. Only death could do that . . .

We sent your body to Jacob that he might bury it in your own woods. It was spring before we saw the grave, a lovely soft April day when the brown fern fronds were uncurling and the air was full of bird song. He led the way to it with an air of pride, for he had chosen the spot with great care.

As we stood looking down at the mound, our hearts were filled with sadness. Not only because of the loss of you, but because your going had finally closed a chapter in our lives. Your life had been a part of many lovely things that were past. Hands beloved by us had held you, caressed you. Your gaiety had made us smile in times when it was hard to smile. And now Jacob stood, leaning on his spade, proud of the pretty place he had chosen for your grave.

THE END

TRANSCRIBER NOTES

Mis-spelled words and printer errors have been corrected. Where multiple spellings occur, majority use has been employed.

Punctuation has been maintained except where obvious printer errors occur.

A cover was created for this ebook which is placed in the public domain.

[The end of *My Scottie* by Mazo de la Roche]