

## The Great White Stallion

One day I heard the tale of the fabulous City of Light. It was said to be an incredibly beautiful place where there was no suffering or death, where all were happy and had all they needed, where there were never any goodbyes. When I first heard of it, it stirred my interest and curiosity, but believing it to be only a myth or legend I tried to forget it. But I couldn't put the thoughts of it out of my mind. I went to library after library searching for books about it. No one had ever been there and come back, but there were reports by people who had claimed to see it or that had talked to people who believed it existed and had left everything to find it. The more I read the more intrigued I became.

Finally I made the decision I would somehow find this City of Light. But where to begin? I asked people and I reread the books. There was a road and at the end of the road the trail to the City of Light began. I found the road and drove to the end. There I found a barn, actually a stable. "What good can come out of a stable?" I asked myself.

I got out of the car and went to look for the proprietor. An elderly gentleman approached from inside the barn. "Been expecting you," he said.

I wondered at this, but was too excited to question. "I heard this is the start of the trail to the City of Light?"

"Sure is," the man replied.

"Well do you have a map that you can send with me?" I asked.

"Map won't do it," he stated matter of fact.

"How about a guide?" I asked.

"The best," he answered and turned to walk back to the barn.

He came back in a minute with a huge white horse following him. I would almost say he was leading the horse only the horse had no halter or bridle - only a saddle.

There was something about this horse that scared me. He had fire in his eyes and looked wild. I asked the man, "Is he tame?"

"No," was all the man's responded.

"Well is he safe?" I asked.

"Depends what you mean by safe," he replied. "If you ask will he get you to your destination? The answer is most definitely, if you stay on his back."

I was shaken and not just a little scared.

"That saddle, it has no saddle horn. How can I stay on?"

"You ride by balance, not by hanging on to something. If you start to fall grab onto the horse's thick mane. It will keep you steady. The saddle may slip, but the mane is part of the horse."

"But there is no bridle, no bit, no reins. How do I control him?"

"You don't. He is in charge."

"I don't like this. I'm at the mercy of a dumb beast who can't even talk. How can I trust him to know the way? Don't you have a proper guide, someone I could converse with and who can understand me? Can't I take a comfortable vehicle. I'll get sore sitting in that saddle all day. Isn't there an easier way?"

"Do you want to go or not? This horse is the only way. The road is rough and there are too many dangers to use any other vehicle or means of transport. You would never make it walking. You couldn't outrun the wolves."

At the mention of wolves, I was having serious doubts about this whole adventure. At that point the horse came over to me, bent his head down to nuzzle me and looked into my eye. It was as if he was saying, "It will be Ok. I will take care of you."

I made up my mind. I would risk it. I climbed into the saddle. The man fastened saddle bags to the back of the saddle. "Provisions," he said. And we were off.

We entered the woods. The trail was narrow with trees close on each side; the forest dense and dark. The horse was walking and I wanted to go faster. I couldn't stop him because I didn't have reins, but nothing could keep me from kicking him to go faster. First, I kicked lightly. He ignored me. Then I kicked harder. He turned his head to look at me and while I didn't hear a voice or see his lips move it seemed as if he was saying, "Are you sure you want to go faster?" I said, "Yes, I do," out loud before I realized I was talking to a stupid horse. He only understands actions not words I said to myself and kicked him again, harder. He looked at me again. Was that sadness in his eye? No. He's just lazy and doesn't want to move. Come on "get up" I yelled kicking as hard as I could. "If you insist," I heard in my mind.

The next thing I knew, we were racing through the woods. The low branches kept hitting me in the face. The near trees bumped and bruised my legs. "Whoa, whoa!" I yelled, but too no avail. How I wished I had reins. So I hung on and dodged branches as best I could until suddenly a big one popped out of nowhere and the next thing I knew, I was on the ground staring up at a white muzzle blowing in my face. Was that concern in his eye?

"All right, all right," I said. "You were right. Let's just take it easy." He nodded his head and whickered as I climbed back into the saddle. The rest of the day was pleasant and uneventful except that that evening I ached. Oh did I ache. I would have been sore enough from the saddle, but my head hurt from the branch, my back hurt from the fall, and my legs hurt from the trees. We camped by a cold stream and I soaked what I could of my anatomy in the icy waters.

The next day I was very stiff and sore. "Please can I walk for awhile to get the stiffness out?" I begged. He pushed me before him with his muzzle so I knew it was Ok. We walked out of the woods and through some open fields. There were birds and butterflies and it was a pleasant day. Around noon I began to tire. He stopped and whinnied again looking back at the saddle. I knew it was time to mount up again. He set off across the fields and meadows at an easy lope. There was no trail as it had ended in the woods. I just had to trust that he knew the way.

I won't say much about the next day except that it was miserable. It was gray and rainy. I had a poncho but still got wet. The poor horse had no covering and could have taken shelter but he was faithful to his duty to get me to the city so he endured the wind and the rain beating on his face and kept going.

Days faded into days and still he kept going, through all sorts of terrain, yet still there was food and provisions in the saddlebag.

One day we went through a swamp and I was scared of quicksand. I held on to the mane tightly and we made it through, not without getting covered with mud, however, and leeches. The horse had the worst of it though because his legs were constantly in the water, mine were just in when it got real deep. I pulled the leeches off of both of us. "Couldn't we have gone around and avoided the swamp?" I asked him that night. He shook his magnificent head and I was beginning to believe he could understand me. Periodically I found myself talking to him on the trail. Was that from loneliness or did I sense that he could understand?

Sometimes we had to go down sharp ravines and up steep hillsides. These were sort of fun and sort of scary too. At first more scary than fun. But when I learned that I could trust my horse and just needed to balance properly and hold on to the mane going up, it became more fun. He was a very surefooted horse and never once slipped.

One day we came to an open meadow, almost a small prairie, but it was full of thorn bushes. "Oh please not through there," I begged. He turned to look at me and I heard "We must." Again I wished I had reins. "No! There must be another way, a way around." But it was useless. I hung on and in we went. I cried out each time a thorn scratched me, and I complained bitterly. "You're not doing your job. You are supposed to protect me, not cause me pain." (It wasn't until later that I

realized he was very carefully finding his way between thorn bushes and it could have been much worse.) Finally we were through and we stopped again at a stream. My pants were in shreds and my legs covered with scratches. I was hurt and mad. "What's the matter with you? Don't you care?" I yelled at him. Then I got off and the sight made me cry. His beautiful legs were a mass of scratches far worse than mine and no longer were they pure white, but red. He lowered his head and looked at me sadly. "I took the worst of it for you."

"I'm so sorry. I didn't understand," I cried. We both went to the stream where the clear cold water washed away the dirt and blood and brought healing to our wounds. I hung on his neck and told him I loved him. He nuzzled me and whinnied softly as his long thick mane fell over both of us.

A few nights later we had our encounter with the wolves. I was sleeping when suddenly I was being shaken. "Get up, get up, and get ready to go." I woke up sleepily and went through the motions almost in my sleep. I had done it so many times by now. But before I could mount up I heard the howling and yelping and I froze motionless. Dark furry shapes emerged from the forest. I could not see them clearly it was so dark. They seemed like shadow forms. All I could see clearly was my great white horse who I now looked to for my only hope and protection. He was calm. Waiting and watching. The wolves leaped at me, but he was there suddenly a fury of teeth and hooves. I saw one wolf sail into the air after being grabbed by the neck and tossed like a rag puppy. I heard a dull thud as hooves crushed skull bones and the wolves yelled and howled. Suddenly it was quiet. "Quick, to my back." I obeyed and we were off. I had learned from the first day's ride to keep low. I plastered myself to his neck and hung on with both fists twisted in his thick mane. I heard the wolves behind. But my horse was swifter. We went crashing through the forest into the black night. After awhile the howls grew faint and the moon came out. "We can rest now." I slid off his back and collapsed from physical and nervous exhaustion. He must have stood guard over me all night.

In the morning I could see what the wolves had done. I was unharmed, but he had deep gashes in his flanks and on his legs. It was a wonder he was able to run like that. We had to stay there for several days until his wounds healed before we could continue. I loved him even more after that.

We had been traveling through mountainous country and were just almost to the top of a low mountain when I heard him say (for by now I realized that he not only understood what I said, but was speaking to me.) "Do you trust me?"

"Of course, I trust you," I replied. He was silent. We came to the top of the rise and to the very edge of a cliff - far below a river wound its way through the gorge. "Do you still trust me?" he asked again. Somewhat confused, I answered "yes" again. He backed off from the edge for a couple hundred feet faced the gorge and I could feel his muscles tense. Suddenly I realized he was planning on jumping the gorge. No wonder he asked if I trusted him and I had so glibly replied yes. But there was no time to change my mind now. He started into a fast gallop. I clung to his mane and shut my eyes. Over the ground we ran hooves beating a rhythm on the turf, then no sound as the air whistled by, then a thud as his hooves struck the other side. We had made it. "Did we have to do that?" I asked.

"Yes," he replied. "The gorge was in our way so I took you over it."

We came through the mountains and into an area fairly level of wide meadows and some woods. Although not thick it was pleasant and I was enjoying the scenery. Suddenly he stopped and his head came up, ears turning to and fro, nostrils distended. I listened too - it was awfully quiet. No birds were chirping. "Fire," he said. I turned around and saw a plume of smoke coming up from behind the hill. "We must run for the river," he said. We started to run, but the fire seemingly coming from nowhere almost engulfed us. The wind picked up and drove the flames before it. Trees overhead were burning and their limbs came cracking to the ground around us. He jumped over one, ran under another. Smoke and flames were everywhere. How he found a way through that inferno I will never know. I was so glad I had no bit nor bridle to slow him down or pull against him. I was so glad he was in control. The river appeared just ahead. We plunged in and swam to the other side. It was wide enough. The fire could not cross. But what a sight we were. My face was dark with soot. Welts of

burns here and there where burning branches had hit me. But when I dismounted I realized again he had taken the worse of it. His once beautiful flowing tail that fairly dragged the ground was now a short wisp all singed and brown. His mane pulled out and singed. His legs and body had bare places where he had been branded by the flaming branches. This once gorgeous creature now looked awful. The rest of his once white body was now black with soot. His eyes red and swollen. He had to watch where he was going while I had kept mine closed. We rested there a long time. The soot came off and the burns healed. But we both had scars and his tail and mane were still so pitiful.

We had been traveling it seemed like forever. I used to ask him "How much longer?" but he never answered so I had given up. Sometimes I almost wondered if we would ever reach our goal. Then one day out of nowhere he announced, "We are getting near the end of our journey. We have one more river to cross. I have asked you before if you trusted me. This river will test your faith as never before. Cling to me and you will make it." He had not taken me the way I wanted to go, but the way I had to go. He had been with me and even though often the way was painful, no real harm had come to me. I looked at the scars on his once unblemished beautiful coat. I look at his short singed tail that once was long and beautiful. I looked at my own scars. They no longer hurt, but were a reminder of all we had been through together. Yes, I would trust him, even to death.

Not many days after that we emerged from a wooded area suddenly to look down at a fearsome river. Wild it was, strewn with huge boulders and churning water. It looked too deep to wade through, too swift to swim, too wide to jump. How could we possibly make it. After the initial shock of the river I raised my eyes to the horizon and I could just barely make out the towers and spires of a city, gleaming in the sun or was the light coming from the city itself? The City of Light! It was real, and we were almost there. This then was the last river. We would make it, somehow.

We plunged into the icy water. How could I possibly hang on, my body quickly became numb with the cold. We were being towed by the current. Then we went under. I couldn't breathe. I wanted to let go and swim to the surface. I needed air. But I had learned I couldn't make it on my own. I said I would trust him so I hung on to what was left of his mane. I needed to breathe. I remember the cold water filling my mouth and the next thing I remember we were on the shore. I was still on his back. He turned his head and looked at me as if to say "It is time to get off. The ride is over." I breathed deeply of the clean, fresh, fragrant air. Still somewhat dazed at being alive. I slid off his back and right away noticed he looked different. His scars were gone. His mane and tail full and long again. His coat was whiter than I had ever seen it, shiny, silver white. I looked at my arms and legs. My scars were gone as well. He put his head down and I hugged his sleek glossy neck. As I did so a radiation started coming from his body. I took a step backward and then another as the intensity grew. Soon I could barely stand to look at him so brilliant he had become. Then his form seemed to change and no longer did he have the appearance of a horse. Now in the shape of a man, I understood who my faithful companion, deliverer and salvation, who had carried me over all those many miles, really had been all along.