

Black Beauty



When Black Beauty is trained to carry a rider on his back, or to pull a carriage behind him, he finds it hard at first. But he is lucky – his first home is a good one, where his owners are kind people, who would never be cruel to a horse.

But in the nineteenth century many people were cruel to their horses, whipping them and beating them, and using them like machines until they dropped dead. Black Beauty soon finds this out, and as he describes his life, he has many terrible stories to tell. [Word count 15,400]

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Black Beauty

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BLACK BEAUTY

'What more could I want?' says Black Beauty, as he describes his pleasant home and his kind owners. 'Freedom! For the first four years of my life I had a large field where I could gallop around at full speed – with no straps, no bit, and no blinkers. Now I stood in a stable, night and day, except when I was wanted for work.'

In the 1870s there was plenty of work for horses – pulling carriages and cabs and carts through crowded cities, along country roads, in all kinds of weather.

Black Beauty has been well trained. He knows that he must never bite or kick or run away, and must always do what he is told, however tired or hungry he feels. He always behaves well, but when he is sold, first to one owner, then another, and another, he learns how hard a horse's life can be, and how stupid and how cruel some people are . . .



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Human Interest

Black Beauty

Stage 4 (1400 headwords)

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ANNA SEWELL

Black Beauty

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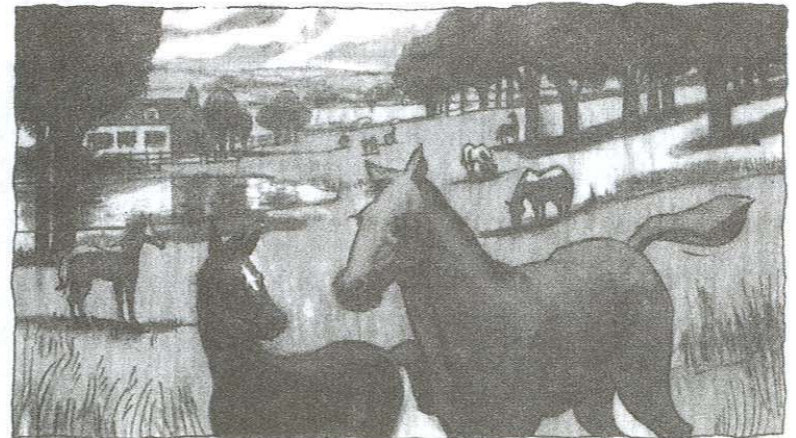
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My first home

The first place I can remember well was a pleasant field with a pond of clear water in it. Trees made shadows over the pond, and water plants grew at the deep end. On one side was another field, and on the other side we looked over a gate at our master's house, which stood by the roadside. At the top of our field were more tall trees, and at the bottom was a fast-running stream.

While I was young, I lived on my mother's milk, but as soon as I was old enough to eat grass, my mother went out to work during the day and came back in the evening.

There were six other young horses in the field, although they were older than I was. We all galloped together round



The first place I remember was a pleasant field.

the field, and had great fun. But sometimes the others would kick and bite.

'They are young farm horses and haven't learned how to behave,' my mother told me. 'You are different. Your father is well known, and your grandfather twice won the most important race at Newmarket. Your grandmother was quiet and gentle, and you have never seen me kick or bite, have you? I hope you will grow up to be gentle and a willing worker, and never bite or kick.'

I have never forgotten my mother's advice. She was a clever and sensible old horse. Her name was Duchess, but our master often called her Pet. He was a good, kind man, and my mother loved him very much. Whenever she saw him at the gate, she trotted across. He used to pat her and say, 'Well, old Pet, and how is your little Darkie?' I was a dull black colour, so he called me Darkie. He sometimes brought a piece of bread for me, or a carrot for my mother, and I think we were his favourites.

When I was two years old, something happened which I have never forgotten. It was early spring, and there was a light mist over the trees and fields. I and the other young horses were feeding at the lower end of the field when we heard the distant cry of dogs.

The oldest among us lifted his head to listen. 'There are the hounds!' he said, and immediately raced off. The rest of us followed him to the top of the field, where we could see several fields beyond.

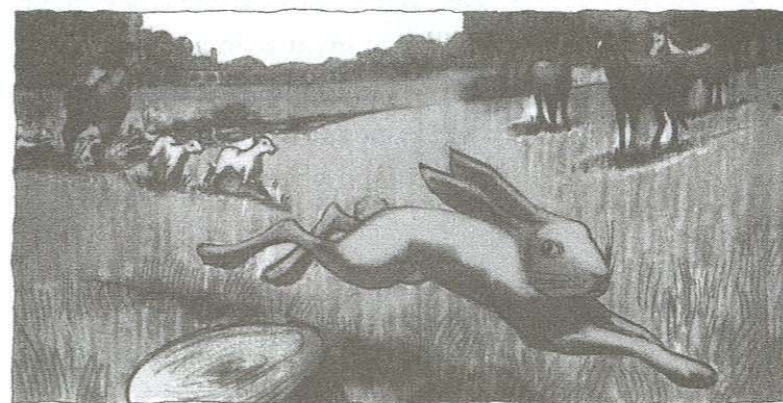
My mother and another old horse were standing near.

'They've found a hare,' said my mother, 'and if they come this way, we shall see the hunt.'

Soon the dogs were all racing down the field next to ours, making a loud 'yo-yo-yo-yo!' sound at the top of their voices. After them came men on horses, some in green coats, and all galloping as fast as they could. Suddenly, the dogs became silent and ran around with their noses to the ground.

'They've lost the smell of the hare,' said the old horse. 'Perhaps it will escape.'

But the dogs began their 'yo-yo-yo-yo!' again and came at full speed towards our field. Just then a hare, wild with fear, ran towards the trees. The dogs jumped over the stream and ran across the field, followed by the huntsmen. Six or eight jumped their horses over the stream, close behind the dogs. Before the hare could get away, the dogs were upon her with wild cries.



A hare, wild with fear, ran towards the trees.

We heard a terrible scream, and that was the end of the hare. One of the men picked her up and held her by the leg. She was covered in blood, but all the huntsmen seemed pleased.

I was so greatly surprised that at first I did not see what was happening by the stream, but when I did look, I saw a sad sight. Two fine horses were down, one in the stream and the other on the grass. One rider, who seemed unhurt, was climbing out of the water, but the other lay quite still.

‘His neck is broken,’ said my mother. ‘I can’t understand why men are so fond of this sport. They quite often hurt themselves and ruin good horses, all for one hare that they could get more easily some other way. But we are only horses, and don’t know why men do these things.’

They carried the dead rider to our master’s house, and I heard afterwards that it was George Gordon, the only son of a local landowner, and a fine young man.

A man from the village came to look at the black horse on the grass. The animal was in great pain and one of his legs was broken. The man began to feel the horse all over, then he shook his head. Someone ran to our master’s house and came back with a gun. Soon after, there was a loud bang and a terrible cry, then all was still. The black horse did not move again.

My mother was very unhappy. ‘I’ve known that horse for years,’ she said. ‘His name was Rob Roy. He was a good brave horse.’ She never went near that end of the field again.

Not many days after, we heard the church bell and saw a long, strange black carriage, pulled by black horses. They were taking the body of young George Gordon to the churchyard to bury him. He would never ride again. I never knew what they did with Rob Roy, but it was all for one little hare.

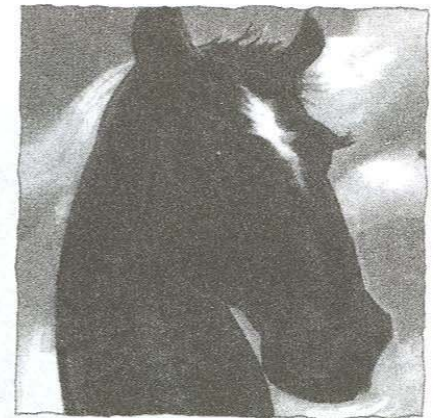
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Birtwick Park

I was beginning to grow handsome. My coat was fine and soft, and was a shiny black. I had one white foot, and a pretty white star on my forehead. When I was four years old, Mr Gordon came to look at me. He looked closely at my eyes, my mouth, and my legs, and then I had to walk and trot and gallop for him.

‘When he has been trained,’ Mr Gordon said to my master, ‘he will do very well.’

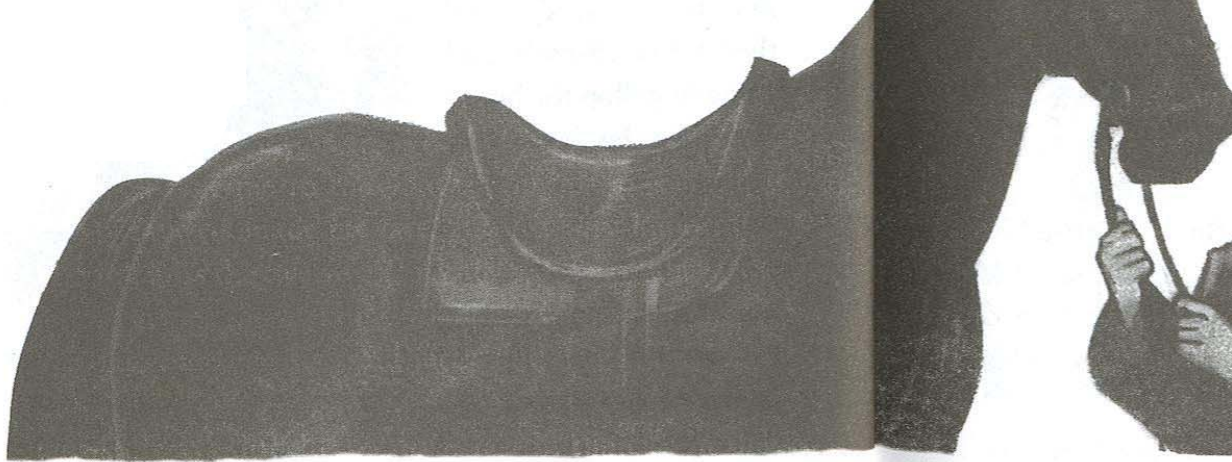
My master liked to train his horses himself before selling them, and the next day my training began.



*I had a pretty white star
on my forehead.*

To train a horse is to teach him to wear a saddle, and to carry a man, woman or child on his back. The horse must also learn to wear a collar, and to stand still when it is put on; then to have a carriage fixed behind him, and to go fast or slow, whichever his driver wishes. He must never bite or kick or talk to other horses, and must always do what his master tells him, however tired or hungry he feels.

Like all horses that have grown up, I had to wear a bit and bridle. A bit is a great piece of cold hard metal, as thick as a man's finger, which is pushed into a horse's mouth between his teeth and over his tongue, with the ends coming out at the corners. It is held there by straps which go over the horse's head, under his neck, round his nose and under his chin. Reins, which the rider holds, are fastened to each end of the bit. Slowly, with my master's kind words and gentle ways, I learned to wear my bit and bridle.

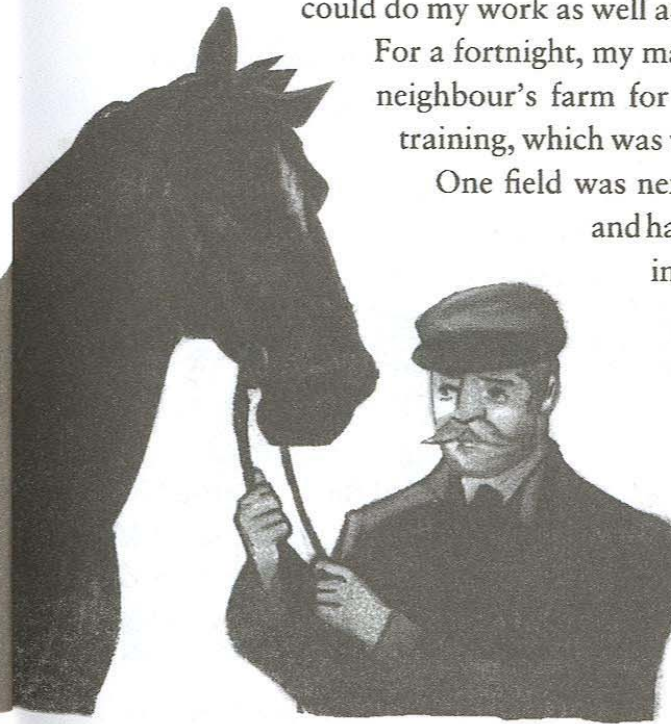


Next there was the saddle. My master put it on my back very gently, then fixed the straps under my body, speaking quietly to me all the time. Then one morning, he got on my back and rode me round the field on the soft grass. He did this every day until I was used to it. Then he took me to the village where a man fixed metal shoes on to each hoof. My feet felt heavy and strange, but I got used to this, too.

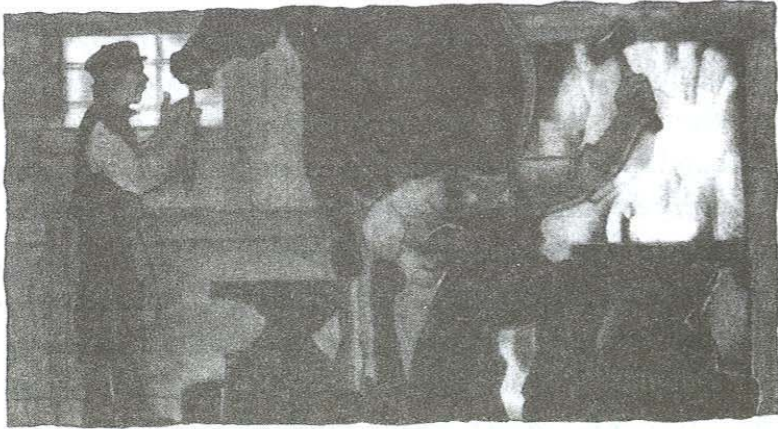
There were more new things to wear. First, a heavy collar on my neck, and a bridle with great side pieces against my eyes, called blinkers. With these on, I could only see in front of me. But in time I got used to everything, and could do my work as well as my mother.

For a fortnight, my master sent me to a neighbour's farm for another kind of training, which was very useful to me.

One field was next to the railway and had sheep and cows in it, and I was put in among them.



*I had to wear a
bit and bridle,
and a saddle.*



A man fixed metal shoes on to each hoof.

I shall never forget the first train that thundered by, and how I galloped to the far side of the field, trembling with fear at this terrible noise. But after a few days I cared as little as the sheep and cows when a train passed by.

It was early in May when a man came to take me away to Mr Gordon's house. My master said, 'Goodbye, Darkie. Be a good horse, and always do your best.' I put my nose into his hand and he patted me kindly, and then I left my first home.

* * *

Mr Gordon's house, which was called the Hall, stood in Birtwick Park, near the village. We went into the Park through a large gate, then trotted along a smooth road between some trees to the house and gardens. Beyond this were the stables.

There was room for many horses and carriages. My

stable had four good stalls and a large window. It was very pleasant. The first stall was called a loose box, where a horse is not tied up all the time but is free to move around as he likes. It is a great thing to have a loose box. The groom put me into it and gave me some oats. Then he patted me, spoke kindly, and went away. In the stall next to mine stood a little fat grey pony.

'Hello,' I said. 'What is your name?'

'Merrylegs,' he said, turning round. 'I'm very handsome. I carry the young ladies on my back, and sometimes I take Mrs Gordon out in one of the carriages. Are you going to live next to me in the box?'

'Yes,' I said.

'Then I hope you are well-behaved,' he said. 'I don't like anyone who bites.'

A horse's head looked over from the stall beyond. It was a tall brown mare, and she did not look pleased. 'So it's you who has turned me out of my box,' she said.



In the next stall stood a little fat grey pony.

'I'm sorry,' I said, 'but the man put me in here, so it is not my fault. I don't want to argue with anyone; I just wish to live in peace.'

Later, Merrylegs told me about the tall brown mare.

'Ginger has a bad habit of biting people,' he explained. 'One day, she bit James in the arm, and Miss Flora and Miss Jessie, the children, were afraid to come into the stable after that. If you don't bite, I hope they'll start to come again.'

I told him I never bit anything except grass and could not understand why Ginger bit people.

'No one was ever kind to her before she came here,' said Merrylegs. 'John and James do all they can to please her, and our master is never unkind. I'm twelve years old, and I know that there isn't a better place for a horse all round the country than this. John has been here fourteen years and is the best groom there ever was. And you never saw a kinder stableboy than James. There was no reason for Ginger to bite anyone. It's her own fault that she did not stay in the box.'

The name of the groom was John Manly. The next morning, he got out his brushes and gave me a good grooming, then put a saddle on me. He rode me slowly at first, then at a trot, then at a gallop. As we came back through the Park, we met Mr and Mrs Gordon. They stopped and John jumped off.

'Well, John, how does he go?' said Mr Gordon.

'He's a fine horse, sir,' said John. 'He's fast, but the lightest touch of the rein will guide him. They were

shooting birds near Highwood, and a gun went off close by. He pulled up a little, but I just held the rein and he wasn't frightened at all. It's my opinion he was never frightened or beaten when he was young.'

'Good,' said Mr Gordon. 'I'll ride him tomorrow.'

I remembered my mother's advice, and the next day I tried to do exactly what my master wanted me to do. He was a very good rider, and when he came home his wife was waiting for him at the door.

'How do you like him, my dear?' she asked.

'I have never ridden a more pleasant horse,' answered Mr Gordon. 'What shall we call him?'

'What about Blackbird, like your uncle's old horse?' said his wife.

'He's far handsomer than Blackbird,' said Mr Gordon.

'Yes,' she said, 'he's quite a beauty, and he has a kind, intelligent face. Shall we call him Black Beauty?'

'Black Beauty – why, yes, I think that's a very good name,' said Mr Gordon.

John went into the stable and told James.

'I'd call him Rob Roy,' said James, 'if it did not remind everyone of the past. I never saw two horses more alike.'

'That's not surprising,' said John. 'Didn't you know that Farmer Grey's old Duchess was the mother of them both?'

So poor Rob Roy who was killed at the hunt was my brother! Now I understood why my mother was so unhappy when he died.

John was very proud of me, and seemed to know just

how a horse feels. And James was kind, too.

A day or two later, I went out in the carriage with Ginger. I wondered how we would get on together, but I found it easy to trot along beside her.

Merrylegs was a happy little pony and was everyone's favourite. We were soon great friends and I became quite happy in my new home.

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Ginger's story

What more could I want? Freedom! For the first four years of my life I had a large field where I could gallop around at full speed – with no straps, no bit, and no blinkers. Now I stood in a stable, night and day, except when I was wanted for work, and sometimes when John took me out, I felt so strong, so full of life, that I wanted to jump or dance.

‘Calm down, boy!’ he would say.

Then, as soon as we were out of the village, he would let me trot fast for a few miles. Some grooms punished a horse for getting too excited, but not John. He knew how to control me with only the sound of his voice, and I was very fond of him.

Sometimes we did have our freedom in the field for an hour or two. This was on fine Sundays in the summer,

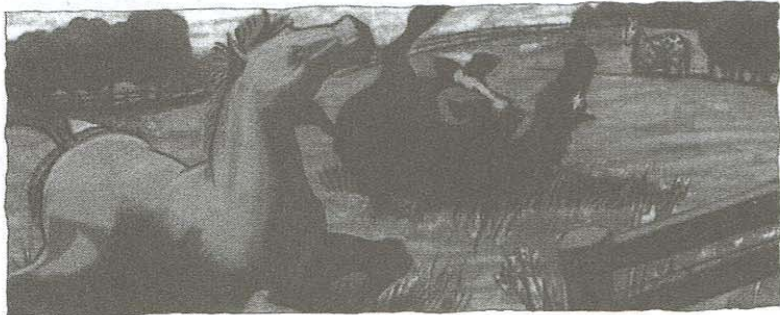


I went out in the carriage with Ginger.

because the carriage never went out on Sundays. It was wonderful. The grass was cool and soft to our feet, and the air was so sweet. And we could gallop or lie down or roll over on our backs, or do what we liked.

One day Ginger asked me about my old home and my training. When I finished telling her, she said, 'Life has been different for me. I was taken from my mother when I was young, and there was no kind master like yours to look after me. I had a bad time when I was trained. Several men caught me in a corner of the field and one held my nose so hard that I could only just breathe. Then another pulled my mouth open to put the bit in, and I was pulled along and beaten from behind. They didn't give me a chance to understand what they wanted.

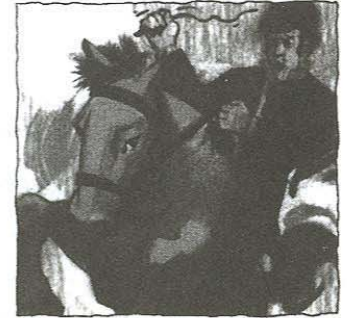
'The old master, Mr Ryder, knew about horses, but he gave up most of the business to his son, who was tall and strong, but not gentle. They called him Samson, and he said that no horse could throw him out of the saddle. One day, he made me run round the field on a long rein until I was



We could lie down or roll over on our backs.

very tired and miserable. The next morning he did the same again, then he put a saddle and bridle on me, and a new kind of bit into my mouth.

'The new bit was very painful and I pulled away and stood up on my back legs, which made him very angry. He stayed in the saddle and beat me with a whip, but after a long and terrible battle I threw him off and galloped to the other end of the field.



'He beat me with a whip.'

'I watched him go into the stable, but no one came to fetch me. Time went on and the sun was very hot. I was hungry and very thirsty. At last, just as the sun was going down, the old master came out with some oats. He spoke kindly and held out the oats for me to eat, then patted me gently and looked at the blood on my sides where Samson had whipped me.

"'Poor girl!" he said, then led me to the stable. Samson was there. "Keep out of the way," said the master. "You've done a bad day's work for this horse with your bad temper. A bad-tempered man will never make a good-tempered horse." He led me into my box and took off my saddle and bridle. Then he called for some warm water and gently cleaned the blood from my sides.

'After that, he often came to see me, but a man called Joe went on training me. He was quiet and thoughtful and I

soon learned what he wanted.

'After my training,' Ginger went on, 'I was bought by a dealer to match another horse of my colour. But then we were sold to a man in London who drove us with a bearing rein – a rein to hold our heads up unnaturally high and to keep them there, for hours and hours, until the pain was terrible. We had to wear two bits instead of one, and mine was so sharp that it made my mouth bleed. Sometimes we waited for hours while our master or mistress was at parties or the theatre, and if we weren't patient, the driver would whip us.'

'Didn't your master care about you at all?' I said.

'Only about how we looked,' replied Ginger. 'He knew very little about horses. The driver told him I had a bad temper but would soon get used to the bearing rein. I was willing to work and learn, but they were so cruel that it made me angry. Then I broke away from the carriage one day, and that was the end of that place.'

'I was sold to another man, but he had a groom as bad-tempered as Samson. He hit me across the legs with his stable brush if I didn't move quickly. I hated him, and one day when he made me angry, I bit him! He never came into my stall after that, and I was soon sold again.'

'A dealer heard of me and said he thought he knew one place where I should do well. "It's wrong for a fine horse to go bad like that," he said. And I was brought here, not long before you came. Of course, it's very different here. But who knows how long it will last? I've decided that all

men are my natural enemies.'

I was sorry for Ginger, but as the weeks went on, she became happier and more gentle.

'I do believe Ginger is getting quite fond of me,' James said one day.

'She'll be as good as Black Beauty one day,' replied John. 'Kindness is all she needs, poor thing!'

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Kindness and cruelty

A neighbour of the Gordons', Mr Blomefield, had a large family of boys and girls who often came to play with Miss Jessie and Miss Flora. One of the girls was the same age as Miss Jessie, two of the boys were older, and there were several little ones. Whenever they came, the children loved to ride Merrylegs.

One afternoon when they were visiting, James brought Merrylegs in and said, 'Now, behave yourself.'

'What did you do, Merrylegs?' I asked him.

'Those young people didn't seem to know when I was tired,' he said, 'so I just threw them off backwards. It was the only thing they could understand.'

'You threw the children off!' I said. 'Oh, no! Did you throw Miss Flora or Miss Jessie?'

'No, of course not! I'm quiet and careful with them, and

with the little ones. I'm the best friend and riding teacher those children have. It's not them, it's the boys,' he said. 'The other children rode me for nearly two hours, then the boys rode me, one after the other, for an hour, hitting me with a stick. I didn't get annoyed but I did get tired, so I stopped once or twice to let them know. But boys think a horse is like a machine and can go on as long and as fast as they want it to. They never think that we get tired. As one was whipping me, I stood up on my back legs and he fell off. He got on again and I did the same. Then the other boy tried and I put *him* down on the grass. They're not bad boys, and don't mean to be cruel, but they have to learn.

'When they told James, he was angry to see those big sticks and told the boys not to use them again.'

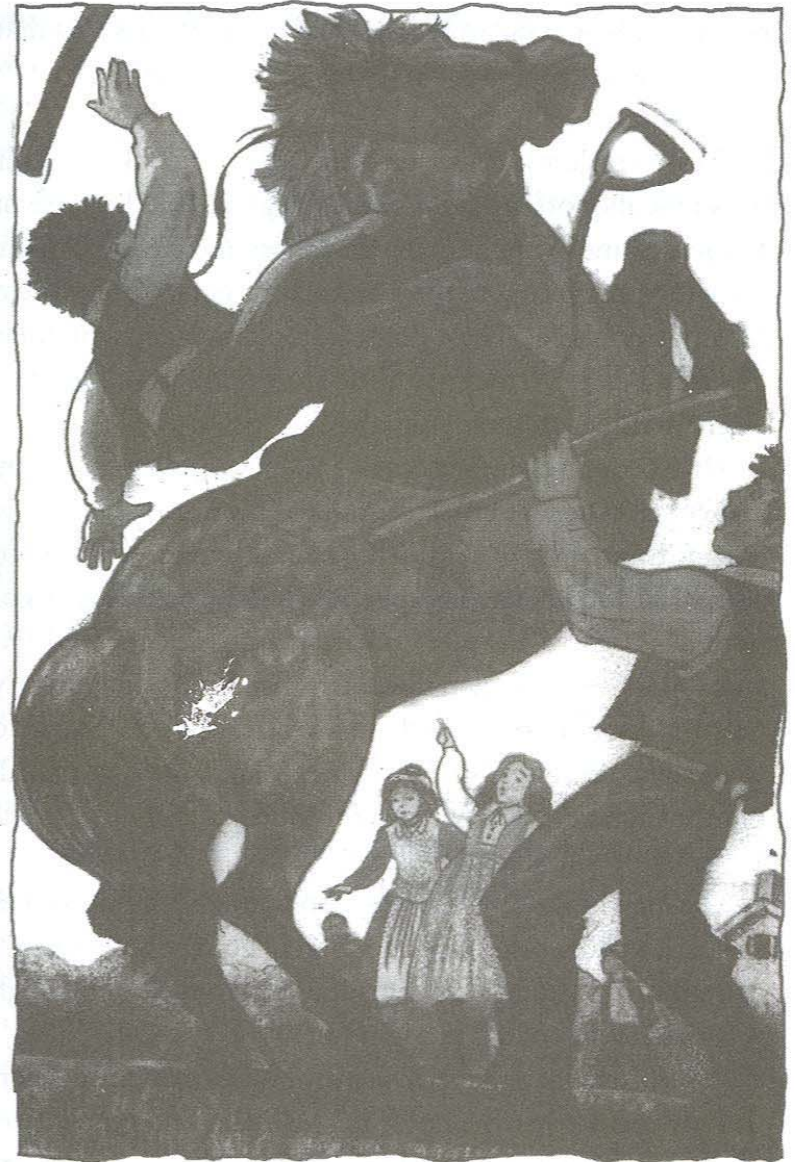
'I would give those boys a good kick,' said Ginger.

'I know you would,' said Merrylegs. 'But they expect me to look after those children, and they expect me to be good-tempered, and I will be. You never had a place where they were kind to you, Ginger, and I'm sorry for you. But good places make good horses, and I wouldn't make our people angry for anything! If I started kicking people, they would very quickly sell me, perhaps to someone cruel. I hope that never happens.'

* * *

I often wondered why Sir Oliver, the oldest horse in the stable, had so short a tail – only about twenty centimetres long – and one day I asked him, 'Did you have an accident?'

'It was no accident!' he said, angrily. 'My long and



Merrylegs stood up on his back legs and the boy fell off.

beautiful tail was cut off when I was a young horse. At that time, some owners thought it was fashionable!

‘How terrible!’ I said.

‘Yes, terrible and cruel,’ said Sir Oliver. ‘Now I can never brush the flies off my sides or back legs, and all because of fashion. Some owners cut off the tails of their dogs to make them look brave, or cut their pretty little ears to make them look fashionable. They don’t cut off the ends of their *children’s* ears, do they? Why do they think it’s all right to do these things to their animals?’

Mr Gordon was never cruel, and he would not stand by and watch others be cruel to animals. We were riding home one morning when we saw a big man driving towards us in a small carriage, pulled by a beautiful little pony. As he got to the Park gates, the pony turned towards them. Without warning, the man pulled the pony’s head round so roughly that the little animal almost fell over. Then he began to whip the pony, angrily. The animal tried to move forward, but the man held it back and continued to whip it.

‘Sawyer!’ shouted my master.

The man looked up. He was a builder who often came to the Park to do work. ‘He’s too fond of going his own way!’ he told my master. ‘He’s not supposed to turn in through your gates; the road is straight on.’

‘You often drive that pony to my house,’ said my master. ‘It only shows that the horse is intelligent and remembers these things. How could he know you weren’t going there today? I’ve never seen a horse beaten so cruelly or with so

much anger. What will people think of you, Sawyer? As well as hurting the horse, you hurt your own good name – do you want people to think of you as a cruel, bad-tempered man?’

We went home slowly, and I could tell by his voice that the master was unhappy at what we had seen.

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The storm

One day in the autumn my master had to go to a distant town on business. John harnessed me to the carriage and the three of us went off. There had been a lot of rain, and the wind was very strong. When we came to the river, the water was so high it nearly reached the wooden bridge, and many of the fields were under water. In one low part of the road the water was half-way up to my knees.

We got to the town and the master’s business took a long time. It was late in the afternoon when we started back for home. The wind was much stronger, and as we drove through a wood, I heard my master say, ‘I’ve never been out in a storm as bad as this, John.’ Indeed, I thought so too, hearing the terrible noise of that wild wind in the trees.

‘I wish we were out of this wood,’ said my master.

‘Yes, sir,’ agreed John. ‘We don’t want one of those branches coming down on top of us.’

But just as he finished speaking, there was a great noise of wood breaking, and a big tree came crashing down through the other smaller trees and fell across the road right in front of us! I was very frightened and I stopped immediately, but I didn't turn round or try to run away. John jumped out and quickly ran to my side.

'What can we do now, John?' said my master.

'We can't drive over the tree or get round it, sir,' said John. 'We'll have to go back to the crossroads, and take the longer road round to the wooden bridge. It will make us late, but the horse isn't tired.'

It was nearly dark when we got to the wooden bridge. We could see water over the middle of it, but this often happened when the river was high. But the moment my feet touched the first part of the bridge, I was sure something was wrong, and I stopped suddenly.

'Go on, Beauty,' said my master, and he touched me with the whip. I did not move, so he hit me sharply, but I would not go forward.

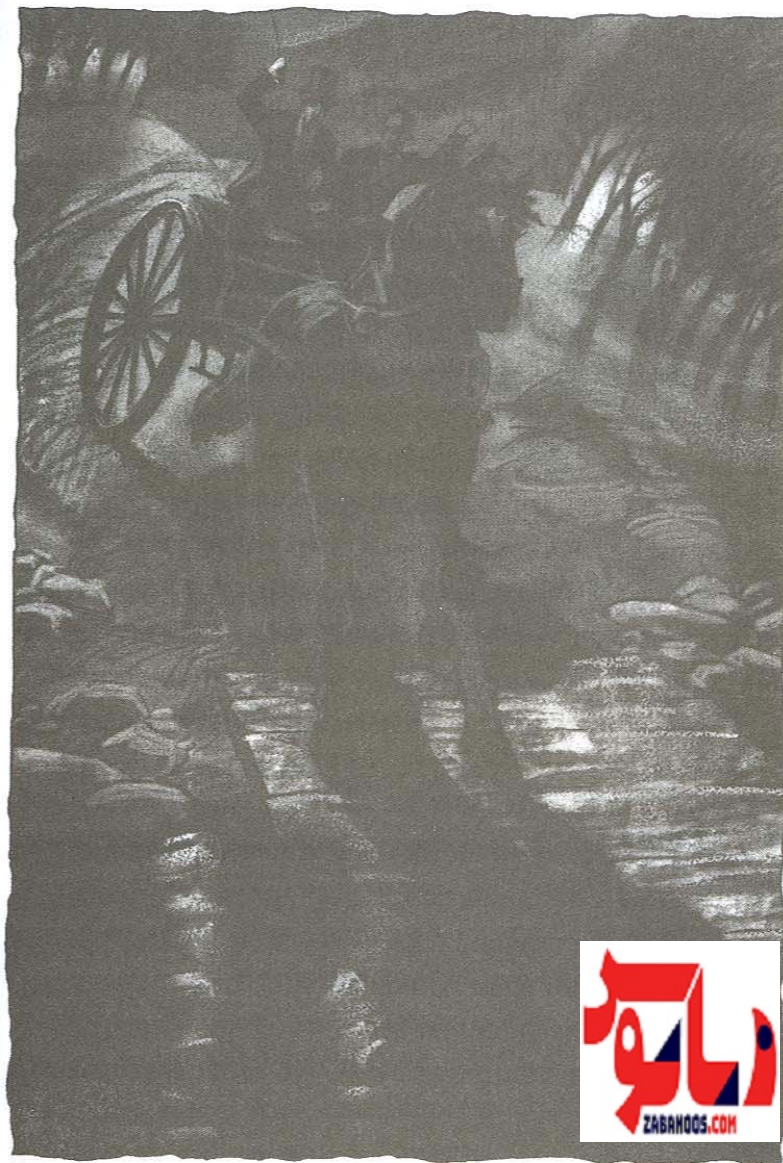
'There's something wrong,' said John, and he jumped from the carriage and began to look round. He tried to lead me forward. 'Come on, Beauty, what's the matter?'

Of course I could not tell him, but I knew the bridge was not safe.

Just then a man ran out of the house on the other side of the bridge. 'Stop!' 'Stop!' he cried.

'What's the matter?' shouted my master.

'The bridge is broken in the middle,' said the man, 'and



I was sure something was wrong.

part of it was carried away. If you come across, you'll fall in the river!

'Thank you, Beauty!' John said to me, and turned me gently round to the right-hand road by the riverside.

It got darker and the wind got quieter as I trotted towards home by another, much longer road. The two men were quiet for some time, but then my master spoke.

'We were very close to drowning in that river, John,' he said. 'Men may be clever enough to think of things for themselves, but animals know things *without* thinking, and that's often saved a man's life, as it has ours tonight. People don't realize how wonderful their animals are, nor do they make friends with them as they should.'

When we arrived back at Birtwick Park, the mistress ran out to meet us. 'I've been so worried!' she said. 'Are you all right? Did you have an accident?'

'We nearly did,' said my master. 'But Black Beauty was cleverer than we were, and saved us all from drowning!'

* * *

One morning early in December, the master came to the stable with a letter in his hand, looking very serious.

'Good morning, John,' he said. 'Tell me, does James work hard and do what you tell him to do?'

'Yes, sir, always,' replied John.

'And he doesn't stop work when your back is turned?'

'Never, sir.'

'And if he goes out with the horses, does he stop to talk to friends, or go into houses where he has no business, leaving

the horses outside?' said the master.

'No, sir,' said John. 'And if anybody has said that about James, I don't believe it. I never had a pleasanter, more honest young man in this stable.'

The master smiled and looked across at James, who was standing by the door. 'James, I'm glad John's opinion of you agrees with my own,' he said. 'I've had a letter from my wife's brother, Sir Clifford Williams. He wants me to find him an honest young groom who knows what he's doing. The man who drives his carriage is getting old and needs a young man who will work with him and be able to do his job one day. How old are you?'

'Nineteen next May, sir,' said James.

'That's young. What do you think, John?'

'It is young, sir,' said John, 'but he's tall and strong. He doesn't have much experience of driving, but he has a light touch and a quick eye.'

'Well, James,' said the master, 'talk to your mother at dinner-time and let me know what you want to do.'

A few days later it was agreed that James would go to Clifford Hall in a month or six weeks, and for the next few weeks he drove the carriage. We went in and out of town, through busy streets, and to the railway station, where the road was narrow and there were lots of other carriages hurrying to and from the station.

Then my master and mistress decided to visit some friends who lived about seventy-five kilometres from our home. 'You can drive us, James,' said my master.