



Anna Sewell's
Black Beauty

adapted by Peter Howard

I can remember when I was a baby colt. In those days I could not eat grass. I lived upon my mother's milk. In the daytime I ran by my mother's side in a large paddock. At night I slept close to her. When it was hot, we stood by a clear pond under some trees. When it was cold, we went into a nearby shed.

As soon as I was old enough to eat grass, my mother went to work in the day and came back at night. While she was away, I had fun with other colts, galloping together. Sometimes we would kick and bite one another. One day when we had all been biting and kicking, my mother whinnied to me and said: "Now listen carefully. The other colts are cart-horse colts. You are well bred. Your grandfather was a fine racehorse. I never bit or kicked, so why should you? Always behave well and lift up your feet when you trot."

I have never forgotten her advice. She was wise and our master liked her. Her name was Duchess, but he often called her Pet. Our master was a kind man. When my mother saw him, she would neigh with joy and go up to him. He would pat her and say, "Well, old Pet, and how is your little Darkie?" I was a dull black colour, so he called me Darkie.

There was a boy who helped on the farm. He often came into our paddock. Sometimes he would throw sticks or stones at us to make us gallop. One day he was annoying us but the master was watching from the next paddock.

"Hey, Dick!" he shouted. "You bad boy!" And, running up to the lad, gave him a slap across his ear. "Here, take your money and don't come back to work here again."

Before I was two years old, something happened which I have never forgotten. It was early spring. The other colts and I were feeding in the lower part of the paddock when we heard a cry of dogs. The oldest colt pricked up his ears and said, "Listen to the hounds."

We all cantered to the top of the paddock and joined my mother and another horse. "They are hunting a hare," my mother said.

The dogs did not bark but went "Yo! Yo! O! Yo!" After them came men on horseback. The dogs had their noses pressed close to the ground.

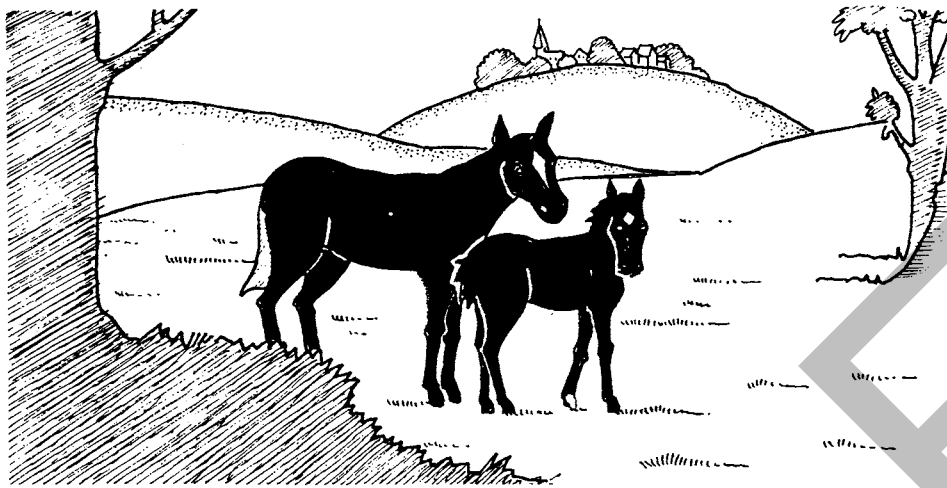
"They are after one of the hares from the woods," said the old horse. And then we saw the frightened hare come rushing past. On it ran up to a thick hedge. It could not get through and the dogs were upon it. One huntsman whipped the dogs off the hare and grabbed the wounded animal. He held it up, torn and bleeding for the men to see.

By the creek a horse had fallen and was lying in pain on the bank. His rider was also lying on the ground but quite still.

"The man's neck is broken," said my mother.

"And it serves him right, too," said one of the colts.

I thought the same as this was a cruel sport. My mother agreed and said that she could never understand why men hunted animals.



My master carried the man to his house. I heard later that the injured person was George Gordon, the Squire's only son. Other men rode to fetch the doctor and a vet. Presently there was a loud bang. The vet had ordered the horse to be shot as one of his legs was broken. My mother was very upset as she had known this horse, Rob Roy, for years.

A few days later we heard the church bell ringing. It was the funeral of young Gordon who had died. All this for the sake of one little hare.

At the end of each chapter, there are questions. Circle each correct answer.

- 1 As a baby I could not have
(a) milk (b) grass (c) fun
- 2 Who gave me some good advice ?
(a) the owner (b) my grandfather (c) my mother
- 3 Dick was fired from his job because
(a) he threw stones at the colts (b) he was lazy (c) he gave cheek
- 4 What were the men hunting ?
(a) a hare (b) a fox (c) a badger
- 5 How did Rob Roy die ?
(a) He fell and broke its neck (b) He had a heart attack (c) He was shot

I was now beginning to grow handsome. My bright black coat was soft. One of my feet was white and there was a white star on my forehead.

When I was four years old, Squire Gordon came to look at me. After feeling my legs and looking at my mouth and eyes, he said that I would do well after being broken in. My master promised to break me in himself.

The next day it all began. I had to learn to wear a saddle, bridle and bit and carry a person on my back. I also learned to obey commands. The worse part was having the bit in my mouth. The steel sat between my teeth over my tongue. The end of the bit came out of the corners of my mouth and were held by a strap over my head. My mother always wore a bit when she went out so it seems as if I must wear one, too.

The saddle was not quite so bad. My master and old Daniel, who was in charge of the horses, always gave me oats after putting on the saddle. When my master rode on me it felt queer at first.

Then the blacksmith put on my shoes. He drove nails into my feet but that did not hurt. They felt heavy as I walked. A harness was put on my head with blinkers so I could only see straight ahead. But worst of all was the small saddle with a strap that went under my tail, called a crupper. I felt like kicking whenever that was put on me.

Another part of my training was to live in a paddock near a railway line. This was to get me used to the steam trains that rushed by. I ran for my life when the first train came. But like the cows in the paddock, I soon took no notice of the monster.

My master often drove me in double harness with my mother, because she could teach me. She told me that the better behaved I was, the better I would be treated. "But," she said, "there are many kinds of men. There are fine men like our master, and there are bad cruel men who ought not to have a dog or horse of their own. I hope a kind person buys you, but wherever you go, keep up your good name."

Early in May a man from Squire Gordon's took me away from home. My master said, "Goodbye, Darkie - be a good horse and always do your best." I could not say goodbye, so I put my nose in his hand. He patted me kindly.

We entered Squire Gordon's park by an iron gate near the village of Birtwick. At the end of a road was the house, gardens, stables and home paddock. My stall in the stables was roomy. A stable boy named James fed and patted me.

In the next stall was a fat grey pony. "How do you do?" I said, "What is your name?"

"My name is Merrylegs. I am twelve years old, handsome and I carry ladies on my back. If you are going to live next to me I hope you don't bite."

Just then another horse looked over from the stall beyond. It was a tall chestnut mare. "So it's you who have taken my stall. It seems strange that a young colt can turn a lady out."

I explained that I had nothing to do with choosing this stall.

Later, Merrylegs told me that the mare was called Ginger. "She has a habit of

biting," said Merrylegs. "One day she bit James. Now Miss Flora and Miss Jessie are afraid to bring pieces of bread into the stable, which I miss very much. Ginger must have been badly treated at some time. But there is really no excuse for her behaviour as everyone is so kind. It is Ginger's fault that she was moved."

- 1 The person who broke me in was
(a) Daniel (b) my master (c) Squire Gordon
- 2 A bit is made of
(a) steel (b) leather (c) wood
- 3 The shoes on my feet
(a) felt heavy (b) hurt a great deal (c) felt very light
- 4 The monster was a
(a) an electric train (b) a large bull (c) a steam train
- 5 Squire Gordon lived near
(a) Birtby (b) Birtwick (c) Birtleigh
- 6 Who was Squire Gordon's stable boy ?
(a) John (b) Jack (c) James
- 7 Who brought pieces of bread for the horses ?
(a) the stable boys (b) Flora and Jessie (c) the Squire

Answers

Chapter 1 1 (b) 2 (c) 3 (a) 4 (a) 5 (c)

Chapter 2 1(b) 2 (a) 3 (a) 4 (c) 5 (b) 6 (c) 7 (b)

Chapter 3 1 (b) 2 (c) 3 (b) 4 (c) 5 (a) 6 (c) 7 (b)

Chapter 4 1 (c) 2 (b) 3 (c) 4 (b) 5 (c)

Chapter 5 1 (b) 2 (c) 3 (c) 4 (a) 5 (b) 6 (b) 7 (a)

Chapter 6 1 (c) 2 (b) 3 (a) 4 (b) 5 (b)

Chapter 7 1 (b) 2 (b) 3 (a) 4 (b) 5 (b) 6 (c) 7 (c)

Chapter 8 1 (b) 2 (c) 3 (c) 4 (a) 5 (b) 6 (a) 7 (a)

Chapter 9 1 (c) 2 (b) 3 (b) 4 (a)

Chapter 10 1 (b) 2 (c) 3 (b) 4 (c) 5 (b) 6 (a)