

TOP READERS

ANNA SEWELL

Black Beauty

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level
3


mm
publications

Contents

Chapter 1.....	4
Chapter 2.....	8
Chapter 3.....	13
Chapter 4.....	18
Chapter 5.....	24
Chapter 6.....	29
Chapter 7.....	34
Chapter 8.....	39
Chapter 9.....	42
Chapter 10.....	46

Activity Section

Chapter 1.....	52
Chapter 2.....	54
Chapter 3.....	56
Chapter 4.....	58
Chapter 5.....	60
Chapter 6.....	62
Chapter 7.....	64
Chapter 8.....	66
Chapter 9.....	68
Chapter 10.....	70

CHAPTER 1

MY FIRST HOME WAS A LARGE FARM WITH A POND IN THE middle of it. There were tall trees for shade and enough space for me to run around in. I played in a green field with lots of grass.

At first, I was too little to eat grass so I drank my mother's milk. Later when I started to eat grass, my mother was able to go to work every day. She pulled a carriage for my master and I played in the field with the other young colts while she was away with him.

I had fun as I galloped with the other young horses. We used to run round and round as fast as we could go. Some of the colts liked to kick and bite as they played. One day, my mother saw us and called me to go to her. 'The young colts that kick and bite are going to be carthorses when they grow up,' she said. 'I hope you will be a good horse that has manners like the other horses in our family. You have never seen me kick or bite and I want you to do the same.'

I have never forgotten my mother's advice. My mother's name was Duchess and she was good and gentle. She loved our master and ran to him whenever she saw him.

'Hello, Duchess. How is your little Darkie?' he asked my mother with a smile every time he saw us together. He called me Darkie because I was a dull black colour. As I grew older, my fluffy hair became a shiny coat and, with the white star on my forehead and my one white foot, it made me look very handsome.

When I was four years old, Squire Gordon came to the field to look at me. He looked at my mouth and eyes. He felt my legs and then I had to walk, trot and gallop for him. Then Squire Gordon turned to my master and said, 'I want to buy him!'

'I will break him in for you first,' said my master. I knew what that meant! It isn't easy for a horse to be broken in. A young horse needs to learn how to wear a saddle, how to carry a rider and how to pull a carriage in the way his master wants.

I had never carried a rider on my back before so I had a lot to get used to. My master gently put a bridle round my neck and a metal bar that is called a 'bit' into my mouth. The bit felt uncomfortable



between my teeth as it pushed my tongue to the back of my mouth, but my master's kind words and nice oats helped me get used to it.

Next, my master put a saddle on my back. He gave me more oats and spoke softly to me while he put the saddle on. It didn't feel so bad, and I soon got used to that, too. In the following days, I would look for the oats as my master came with the saddle.

One morning, my master got on my back and rode me around the field. I didn't mind at all because it made me feel proud to carry my master on my back. Every day, he would come and ride me a little and I soon got so used to it that I even liked it.

Next, I had to get iron shoes from the blacksmith in the village. He cut out some of my hoof and nailed a metal shoe onto each of my hooves. It didn't hurt, but the iron shoes were heavy at first. However, I knew that they were necessary to protect my hooves.

After learning so many new things, my master brought me a harness. It was a leather strap with pieces for the side of my eyes called 'blinkers'. When I wore the harness with the blinkers I was only able to look straight ahead. The harness was heavy and had a strap under my tail that I hated. It made me want to kick but, of course, I could not kick such a good master so I slowly got used to the harness as well.

My master sometimes took me for a walk beside my mother because she was a good horse and she could teach me how to walk properly; I soon got used to pulling a carriage with another horse next to me.

'Work hard so you can be treated well,' she said to me. 'Some men are kind and know how to treat a horse, like our master; but other men are bad and cruel, and they are difficult to work for. And there are also foolish men; they don't know how to take care of a horse and they can be very dangerous... they can destroy a horse without knowing it! You never know who might buy you, but you must always try your best and keep your good name!'



CHAPTER 2

SQUIRE GORDON AND HIS FAMILY LIVED AT BIRTWICK PARK. HIS groom led me past a large iron gate and we went down a long road with tall trees on both sides. The house was surrounded by lovely gardens filled with pretty flowers. We went past the apple trees and the pens until we arrived at the stables.

Once we were there, the groom jumped off my back, took off my saddle and bridle and led me inside the stables. Squire Gordon kept many horses and carriages in beautiful stalls that were large and clean.

The groom led me to the first stall; it was very large and there was lots of room for me to move around freely. He did not tie me up and I liked it very much. He brushed my coat and then gave me some fresh water to drink and nice oats. He patted me and said kind words before he went away to continue his work.

I ate my nice oats and then I looked around. In the stall next to mine there was a fat, grey pony with a thick mane and tail and a pretty head.

‘How do you do?’ I said. ‘What’s your name?’

‘My name is Merrylegs,’ he said. ‘I am very handsome as you can see! The children ride me, and Miss Jessie and Miss Flora love me very much. I’m their favourite! Are you going to live next door to me?’

‘Yes; I think so,’ I said.

‘I hope you have good manners,’ he said. ‘I don’t like horses that bite!’

Just then, I heard a neigh. It came from a tall reddish-brown mare near Merrylegs. She was very pretty but seemed angry. ‘It isn’t good manners to take the stall of another horse,’ she said as she looked at me over the stall.

‘I’m sorry,’ I said. ‘Is this your stall?’

‘Yes, it is,’ she said. ‘They moved me so that you could take it!’

‘I’m sorry, but I didn’t ask anyone to do that; the groom put me here,’ I said.

In the afternoon, when she went out, Merrylegs told me about

