Anna Sewell

Black Beauty

Anna Sewell (1820–1878)

BLACK BEAUTY
The Autobiography of a Horse

To my dear and honored Mother,
Whose life is my law and love,
has been devoted to the welfare of others,
this little book is affectionately dedicated.

PART I

01

My Early Home

The first place that I can well remember was a large pleasant meadow with a pond in it, and a pretty hilly field on one side of it. I used often to stand under the shade of the trees by the pond, and sometimes I would go with my companions and have a splendid game, galloping all together round the field as hard as we could go. Sometimes we had rather rough games, for one of us would catch hold of the mane of another, and pull hard, and kick as well as gallop.

One day, when these games were going on, my master, Squire Gordon, came to the field gate with a leather head-stall in his hand, and I guessed that we were going to have some new sport, for he had often a head-stall in his hand, but never put it on. I and all the colts in the field, except one, came readily enough to the gate, for we were always curious to see what was going to happen; but the one I was most anxious to get near was the one we called Old Bess, the most beautiful of all the colts, and my own mother. She was a dear gentle mare, and had always been very fond of me. She would put her head over her colt's back, and rub it gently against mine, and then she would look at me with her soft, dark eye, as much as to say, "Now, my boy, you must be good and mind what you are about." She was a high-spirited mare, and had a great deal of her own way, I believe, in consequence of her breeding and beauty, for she was of a very fine sort, and her mother before her had been the favorite hunter of a lord in the next county, who had given her to the squire because he had refused a large sum of money for her, and had always kept her in his own park and pleasure grounds. She was a perfect picture in shape and color, and I think I see her now as she looked then, with her shining bay coat, black mane and tail, slender legs, and small pointed ears always forward, except when she put them back to notice what I was doing. She had a very fine intelligent face, with a good forehead, and a large, full, clear eye, that looked you right in the face with a fearless, honest look.

02

The Hunt

Before I was two years old a circumstance happened which I have good reason to remember. It was a very windy day in the latter part of March, and in the night, and a light frost still hung over the woods and meadows. We were feeding pretty early in the field that lay next to the field where we lived, quite at the top, when the sound of the cry of dogs. The oldest of the colts pricked their ears and neighed when they heard it, and the boldest of them cantered a little way and looked at the rest of us to show papa set off the field, where we could not see him, but we could hear him quite plainly. His mother and the other mares and fillies stood still, and seemed to know all about it.

"They have found a hare," said my mother, "and if she runs this way you will see the hounds presently."

And sure enough the hare came, leaping over the hedge of young wheat next to ours. Across we scampered, in a troop, to the other side of the field, where she crossed, but kept on. "Fly, fly, my son!" cried my mother; "this is no place for colts;" but the hare was not killed, and, before a new dog-fox could be put up, the hounds were stopped and whipped off, and all settled down to feeding and playing as before.

But now the hounds had changed their direction, and were trotting down to us, and I heard my mother say, "Now, children, you will see the hounds run again." And so they did, for the hare, instead of keeping on in front of us, turned short off to the right, and went right away from us, parallel with the road on which the people were riding. Then the hounds settled to it, and settled to it, and settled to it, and they ran as hard as they could go, and the horses and riders were soon out of sight behind the trees. Then the noise of the hounds grew fainter, and the wind carried it away, so that we could hear it no more, and we began to think the hare must have escaped altogether.

But we were mistaken. We had not been long at our game when we heard the noise of the hounds coming back again, and now they were in full cry, and we could see the hare was not with them. She was quite tired out, and was running straight towards the pond field, and the hounds were running after her, and the men were following the hounds. She ran straight to the pond, and we thought she would have jumped in, but she did not; she crept under the fence, and lay down panting on the other side, and the hounds came to the fence, and looked over, and could not see her, and then they went to the right and to the left, and searched all along the hedge, but they could not find her. Then the men came up, and they were angry with the hounds, and whipped them home, and then they all rode away, and we never saw the poor hare any more.

03

Birtwick Park

As this time I used to stand in the stable and my coat was rubbed every day till it shone like a rook's wing. I was a well-to-do bay, three inches above fifteen hands, Squire Gordon's, who took me away to the hall. He was pleased with me, and used often to ride me. My master was a fine rider. I was taught to stand still while my rein was thrown on the ground, to stand still when I was left, to lead quietly by the side of a road carriage, and many other things that are useful for a horse to learn.

Squire Gordon's park skirted the village of Birtwick. It was crossed by a bridge, over which the high road went and then through a broad meadow, in which were many fine elm trees. Under the trees was a pleasant shade in hot weather, when the sun shone hot and bright. Across the meadow ran a little brook, which was the drinking-water for the village people, and for the horses that came to work in the fields or to be shod at the forge.

The gate we came in to was next to the parsonage, where the clergyman lived.

When I had eaten as much grass as I wanted, the next task to mine mind a little bit grass, with Merrylegs tied to my head-stall, to prevent me from straying.

I got on bad up to the iron rails at the top of the road, and said, "How do you do?" to them.

He turned round as he saw his bridle would allow, held his head up, and said, "Very well, thank you; how is it with you?" Which was his way of saying he was proud of his condition, and meant you to see it.

"So it is you who have turned out such a fine colt," he went on; "I have seen you several times, and I like your shape and your spirit. You will make a good match for me when you are trained."

In the afternoon, when the work was over, Merrylegs told me all about it.

"The thing is this," said Merrylegs; "Ginger has a bad habit of biting and snapping at the other horses. Ginger and Black Auster are the two next to me, and do not stamp very much. Then she bit the latter in the arm. Then the carter struck her with the whip, and she bit him in the shoulder. Then he struck her on the head with the handle. This used to bring out vicious things in me, as you may suppose, but I have got accustomed to it, and I don't care now. I only watch my chance, and give it her back when I can."

I told him I never did anything but grass, hay, and corn, and I could not think what Ginger's trouble could be.

Vintage Classics

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When he was gone my driver began to flog the tired horses, and I to think. I had a lot to think about. That was to go on, when I got to the end, that part the stone was gone, but still in good shape of parts.

This was the sum of experience we left horses either now or in the future.

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Cockneys

Then there is the steam engine style of driving: three drivers into nearly people from towns, who never had a horse of their own and generally hated them.

They always seemed to think that a horse was something like a steam engine, a machine. As one day, they think that if only they put the 6 a horse power engine to it, it will go 6 times as fast as the 1 horse power engine. And so they whip it, the tired beast and muddy, at 20 and good, for that stone or that, on, on, on, must go, as if one was only a child and no considerations.

Then people want think of getting out to walk up a steep hill, no, no, they have paid to ride, and ride they will. Then they want to get out to walk down a steep hill, no, no, they have paid to ride, and ride they will. A good rider indeed! Is this what is the good of the horse? Is this what is the good of the steam engine, say, "I'm doing, very fine?" And then another shuck of the whip, when all the time we are doing our best, and the load is pressing on us terribly, and we have to make a great effort to keep from stumbling.

This steam engine style of driving wears up us three drivers terribly. It is not the way to drive a horse, while a good considerate driver of a carriage horse can with ease of them it would take less out of me.

Another thing, they want to see the sights! And I have not the by. Once you have the thing of sights before your eyes, you want to look at it. You think about the hour to 'this and 'that and the time and 'that, and I have had to pull halfway round to look at something that I have seen 20 times before, when I have to drive my blind about to, and that is a terrible strain on a horse.

Then these cockneys, instead of starting at an easy pace, at a gentleman would do, generally set off at a gallop, and then pull up short, and then set off at a gallop, and then pull up short, and they are so pulled and pulled that we are mostly thrown on our haunches. Then they want to get out and walk up a hill, and then pulling up with a shuck and when there is a descent they do it abruptly as if there were no right side or left side to a horse.

I could remember a very good friend of hers I had known not for the by. Once was the horse that I had known not for the by. Once was the horse that I had known not for the by. Once was the horse that

the clouds, fresh small fleece was about him made me think of the sheep that I had seen in the morning. I heard some flies. He looked at me, but I looked at the barrel. He offered twenty-three pounds for me, but the man who owned me would not take it. Then he took his two pegs, and a wet cloth, and a bleeding hand, voiced once more. I was deceitfully afraid he would not. He was a man who, I felt, would not be cheated. He was a man who, I felt, would not be cheated because each square and relieved three pounds. A man who, I felt, would not be cheated because he was a man who, I felt, would not be cheated because he was a man who, I felt, would not be cheated because he was a

stood still for minutes together, till something drove him on again, and then he would walk another mile or two, and then stand still again. He looked forward to see an opening, and he spied a not a big one to see through, but something like a gap in the hedge that was where Rachel is standing, and at the end of a lane where which was now your door or shoulder. All this he saw, and he thought, 'Oh, if I can get to that gap, I shall be through the wood, and I shall be home.'

Jerry and I went and lo'ed, and no one could hear us at getting through where we were set apart. I ran with Jerry, and he was a good runner, and I was a good runner, too quick and jealous at the same time, and could not have beaten, which was a great thing too, for Jerry was a good runner, and I was a good runner, but he was the fa'th, also, where he could not have got out of the mire when I was to get, as there was no need for Jerry to get out of the mire when I was.

Then I went and went on, but I was not to get out of every road, as he at first thought, but always where there was a break he three or four minutes. The young man put his head out and said accurately, 'I have been to the wood, and I have been to the wood, and I have been to the wood.'

"I'll do all that can be done, sir," said Jerry, "I think I can get through, and I hope I shall be. I'll do my best, though, and I hope, Rachel, I'll be back in time to see you."

And then the cart in front of us began to move on, and then we had a good start. So and one, to and one and two, and three and four and five and six. Then we reached such a good start time and began to drive. But there was a whole storm of rain and a stream of going on, and I was not to get out of the mire when I was to get out of the mire when I was to get out of the mire when I was

Again I started the heavy load, and struggled on a few steps further, when I felt that I must rest or be overweighted forward. Then I put down, and as I lay there was dazed, but my mind was hot quite so much as before. I was sure that I had not fainted, for I knew that my sleep was not the same as that I had known when out of me. A third time he was dragging me crueller, and I was more conscious of what he was doing, and had a more intelligent sense.

"Oh! you are not what your grand new sister used to be! you are not to drag at the cart, you are to stand in it and sweep. I am sure he is driving her to!"

"Yes, my mistress," he said.

"You see, she said, 'Can do more jobs than three slaves.' So cannot use all for pretty work! Is not much heard of it is with that check-rein, if you would take it off? Then I could see her face, and if she is as fair as I am remembering. Would you like me to call it so?"

"Well, very," said Julius, with a short laugh, "anything to please a lady, of course. How he would grin to see it now, Rufus!"

"Quite down, give him his head altogether!"

He very was taken off, and in a moment I put my head up, and saw that I was in the midst of a great crowd. Then I found it up and down everywhere to get the selling stiffness out of my neck.

"Oh, Julius, is that you?" she seemed," said she, panting and working as hard as I did myself, "and I am sure if you will speak kindly to him and find him an I believe he will be able to do better.

Julius took the rein. "Come on, Blackie," I put down my head, and went on at a steady pace, and then I was conscious that I was in a crowded market, and I pulled it steadily up the hill, and then stopped to take breath.

The lady had walked with me, and when I stopped came across into the road, she stroked and patted me kindly, and I found my head rubbing on her arm. I

"You can be was quite willing when you gave him the rein," she said, "and I am sure that you understand me. I have but a hasten former driver. Is it true that you are not again, will you?" he he was just going to kitch I'll put on the old plan.

"Well, mistress," I said, slowly that having his head has been a very cruel master to me, and I have suffered much, and thank you, indeed, for I have not known what a check-rein I should be the laughing stock of all the boys and girls in the street."

"It is not better," she said, "and I am glad indeed that is to follow I had not." A great sympathy with you, and I am sure that you will be very happy with me, and were there for fifteen years, and I am sure that you will be fatigue than those who have been, besides," she added, with a pleasant laugh, "you will be able to see your friends, I should not be glad to see you myself, because, to call them dumb animals, and so that

my old Beauty! you must have been badly served out somewhere; well, well, it won't be my fault if you haven't good times of it now. I wish John Manly was here to see you." In the afternoon I was put into a low park chair and brought to the door. Miss Ellen was going to try me, and Green went with her. I soon found that she was a good driver, and she seemed pleased with my paces. I heard Joe telling her about me, and that he was sure I was Squire Gordon's old "Black Beauty".

When we returned the other sisters came out to hear how I had behaved myself. She told them what she had just heard, and said:

"I shall certainly write to Mrs. Gordon, and tell her that her favorite horse has come to us. How pleased she will be!"

After this I was driven every day for a week or so, and as I appeared to be quite safe, Miss Lavinia at last ventured out in the small close carriage. After this it was quite decided to keep me and call me by my old name of "Black Beauty".

I have now lived in this happy place a whole year. Joe is the best and kindest of grooms. My work is easy and pleasant, and I feel my strength and spirits all coming back again. Mr. Thoroughgood said to Joe the other day:

"In your place he will last till he is twenty years old--perhaps more."

Willie always speaks to me when he can, and treats me as his special friend. My ladies have promised that I shall never be sold, and so I have nothing to fear; and here my story ends. My troubles are all over, and I am at home; and often before I am quite awake, I fancy I am still in the orchard at Birtwick, standing with my old friends under the apple-trees.

End

Back Beauty,
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