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Black Beauty

By Caroline Thompson

The story of my life
is the story of the people in it.
I haven't always been as lucky
as I am now...
...in this delicious place of water...
...and grass and sunlight.
Mine is a story of trust and betrayal...
...and learning to trust again.
I remember everything.
I'm here, Duchess.
I'll help you.
Come on, old lass.
Come on, push.
Push!
It was cold and too bright
and strange out in the air.
But then my mother kissed me.
I wanted to be nearer to her.
Over here, little one. It's all right.
In the beginning, I stayed as close
to my mother as I possibly could.
As the weeks went by,
I still stayed right beside her...
...but I began to have my own ideas
of what we should do.
So much of the time,
she would just stand there.
Hurry up!
Let's go!
Come on, come on.
I don't like this.
I do not like this!
Don't fight me now.
Everything's changing.
Even I'm changing.
Come on.
A black coat's taking over my baby fur.
It's all happening too fast.
When I turned 3...
...my master sent me to spend the year
with a gang of other colts.
Now it was time.
Training.
The bit was the first thing.

Terrible bars of cold, hard steel
between your teeth and over your tongue.
If you've never had one in your mouth,
you can't imagine what a shock it is.
But thank heaven for oats!
When you're eating them,
you can forget the bit's nasty coldness...
...the bitter, metallic taste.
Delicious oats.
Sweet oats.
Lovely, crunchy oats.
Beautiful oats.
Splendid oats... ow!
Here. It's just a saddle.
It's choking me!
You can still move. Promise.
Nobody could walk with this.
Come back here with those oats.
At first, the iron shoes made
my feet feel stiff and heavy.
I said, "No!" But he said, "Go!"
Come on.
Once I discovered that he and I...
...that the two of us could become one...
...this business turned out to be
perfectly glorious!
It was now time for me
to go to a new home.
My mother was proud of me...
...and encouraged me.
She knew my master would only
let me go to good people.
But I would miss her.
Before long, a man came
to take me to Birtwick Park...
...to live with Squire Gordon's family.
Just a moment! Molly!
- Come here with that pony.
- Run, Merry. Faster!
Please stay inside.
You're still much too weak.
I won't break. I want to see him.
It's a horse. Nothing more, nothing less,
I promise.

A beautiful horse!
Beauty is as beauty does.
How was he, John?
Perfect, sir.
They were shooting rabbits near Highwood
and the guns went off.
He pulled at such, and looked,
but he didn't step off the path.
- Did you, young fella?
- What shall we call him?
We'll decide over tea.
You must get out of this air.
He's as black as ebony.
Ebony.
Ebony.
Sounds like "bones. "
Settle him in the stables.
Pleasure, sir.
We'll call him Blackbird,
after your uncle's old horse.
But Blackbird was ugly
and mean-tempered.
- Wait. You've already named him.
- Pardon?
- "Beauty is as beauty does. "
- That's not a name.
Yes, it is. Beauty.
Black Beauty.
A new name...
...a new home...
...and a stable full of new horses to meet.
She'll be all right.
She was ill-tempered.
She was mean-spirited.
She was vicious.
She was the most beautiful creature
I'd ever seen.
I hate Alfred.
Me too.
Let me down!
Charge!
Lazy pony!
Move!
Stop it!

Move along!
Merrylegs!
- Quick, Merrylegs!
- Run!
Keep running, Merrylegs!
Mine too.
Open mine too!
Merrylegs.
What a perfect name for the little fellow.
Leave him alone!
Whoa there, Joe!
Better let young Joe catch him,
Master Alfred.
He needs the practice.
Go on now. Round them up.
Thank you for offering to help.
I expect it's time for your tea now, isn't it?
Yes, I expect it is.
Tea time, girls.
Jessica, Molly, come along!
It's a good thing John came along
when he did.
It certainly is.
Joe had a good heart...
...but really not a clue.
Stand still, will you?
Stop running.
Come on, everybody!
What a wonderful place.
I flew down to her.
I knew it would be magic between us.
Hey! Wait a second.
What do you think you're doing?
Please!
Easy, Ginger, easy.
- What's the matter with her?
- They must've battered her.
We treat her well and give her her head,
she'll come round, surely enough.
Back him on in.
Kind treatment makes good horses, Joe.
Bad treatment ruins them.
Straighten him out.
I can't.

Yes, you can.
Was I ever going to win her affection?
When we came to the hill...
...instead of slowing down
and leaving me to do the work...
...she threw her weight into the collar
and pulled away, straight up.
Our paces matched perfectly.
I was sure that afterwards,
things would be different between us.
They were.
They were worse.
Now she ignored me completely.
I bounded.
I leaped to the sky!
I tried everything to get her attention.
Even though I was new...
...the squire and John trusted me to
get them safely back from town...
...no matter how terrible the storm.
The wild branches tried to grab me.
The rain stung my eyes
like a thousand bees!
Keep moving, Beauty!
The bridge was flooded.
But it looked safe.
As I reached the middle,
I knew at once that something was wrong.
Beauty, forward!
Go forward!
Everything inside me screamed
not to go any further.
Go forward!
I wanted to obey him but he was wrong.
I know, chum. I know.
How can I make you understand?
We can't go near there!
Come on, Beauty.
For me.
I stood fast.
I tried to tell him.
That's enough!
I didn't know how long
I could hold on to him.

I had to hold on!
God bless you, Beauty.
What happened?
I'll be all right, Mistress.
I just need to look after the horse.
You will not. You come inside at once.
Beauty needs looking after.
I'll look after him, Uncle John.
All right. Do what I've shown you, Joe.
Not Joe.
He doesn't know what to do.
The drying sweat and rain sent a chill
down to my bones.
You don't need that rug.
You're boiling hot.
I wanted my rug.
I wanted a heap of rugs.
The icy water hit my stomach
like a kick in the guts.
But I was so thirsty.
By the next morning...
...I was sick.
Ginger stayed up all night with me.
Feeling sorry for me softened her.
Oh, dear Lord!
It hurts.
There's no rug put on.
Stupid, stupid boy.
I expect the water was cold as well.
Run to the house
and bring another blanket.
Now!
Come on.
You must drink it, come on.
My poor Beauty.
My good horse.
Let's hope it does him some good.
You go on to bed now, John.
I'll stay with him tonight.
We've done the best we can.
He may need some help.
Every little noise was torture.
Alfred, stop it!
Told you!

Children, that's enough!
They're fine, dear.
Please get well.
Uncle John!
Uncle John! Come and see Black Beauty!
I was put into a paddock to recuperate.
Joe came to visit me every day.
Catch me if you can!
What's wrong?
Can't you get up here?
All right, I'm coming.
What are you doing?
No! Not the sheets!
Sorry!
My mistress became so ill...
...we had to take her to a doctor...
...a specialist who lived far away.
You won't smoke that pipe
in these stables.
Yeah, yeah. Keep your shirt on, skinny.
Evening.
Evening.
That idiot left a lamp up here.
Little know-it-all ought
to mind his own business.
You complain about my pipe,
but you leave a lamp near the hay.
For you to see by.
Bring it down here, will you?
Lucky for you I came up here.
What? What's that?
Beauty! It's only for tonight.
What are you afraid of? You'll be all right.
I'll be back for the horse in the morning.
I'm off too.
Easy.
Eat your hay.
The sounds and smells were so strange.
I didn't know what they were.
If you've never heard or smelled
something, how can you understand it?
Whoa, Beauty. I'm here.
I can't leave Ginger!
I won't let it hurt you!

Don't look at it!
I couldn't see anything.
I had to follow him!
Joe saved us.
The other horses were rescued too,
but no one could help our mistress.
Her illness was so advanced...
...that the doctor told her to move
to a warmer place.
The family would have to leave England...
...and us.
Right this way. Leaving in five minutes.
Goodbye, John. Bless you.
Please God, we may see you
back again soon.
Portsmouth train leaving
from platform one.
We love you, Merrylegs.
You're the best.
We'll never forget you.
Time to go, sisters.
I want to thank you, John,
for your faithful service to my family.
We shall never forget you, sir.
Goodbye, my Beauty.
Nevermore were we to see our family.
Nevermore.
It was our last time together
in the big pasture...
...but it was something nobody could
ever take away from us.
They were dancing!
The vicar came to take Merrylegs away.
He'd promised the squire
he would never sell him.
I hated saying goodbye
to that plucky little pony.
In no time, Ginger and Joe and I...
...also found ourselves miles away
from everything dear and familiar.
Horses to the back!
What do you think you're doing?
I swear to you...
...someday, somehow...

...I'll be with you again.
Take me with you now.
Don't go.
But he was gone.
Lady Wexmire, Lord Wexmire...
...Lord George.
They stared.
Staring at us with their critical eyes.
To them, we were no more alive...
...than the bits of harness on our backs.
Look at the long legs
on the chestnut mare.
What a hunter she'd make.
She'd fly over the jumps.
You must put these horses' heads higher.
They're not accustomed
to the bearing rein.
Their groom said they'd never used
the rein on either one.
- Didn't he, York?
- He did, my lord.
Be safer to bring them up by degrees.
Pish-posh!
These animals are not fit to be seen.
One notch tighter won't kill them, will it?
York?
As you wish, my lady.
Reuben, attend to the mare.
When a bearing rein is tightened,
it pulls back your head...
...so that you have to carry it
uncomfortably high.
People think it makes a horse look fancy.
But it made Ginger angry.
This was a very grand place we'd come to.
Three or four times the size
of Birtwick Park...
...but not at all pleasant...
...if a horse may have an opinion.
Ordinarily, we would have
put our heads down and forward...
...but not now.
Now we had to pull with our heads up.
Pain shot through our backs and legs.

For what?
For fashion.
Rein them tighter, York.
As you wish, my lady.
Reuben, shorten the bearing rein
on the mare.
A bearing rein is well named.
For it is unbearable.
It makes no sense.
And nonsense can drive a horse mad.
Rein them tighter, York!
As you wish, my lady.
I didn't know how much longer
Ginger could stand it.
For pity's sake.
Are you never going to get their heads up?
Raise them at once!
As you wish, my lady.
Quickly!
And then it happened.
You incompetent fool!
Whoa, there!
Keep a hold of her!
Hang on!
I can't be late for the Duchess!
Get him! Quick!
Give it here. Now, get that shaft off.
Go on! Get it!
The bloody rein's choking her.
There, lassie.
You idiot!
These horses have more brains than you!
Cover the chestnut with a blanket.
You fetch hot water and lotion
for the black one.
Whoa, there.
Stay!
Take care of the black one too.
As you wish, Mr. York.
My leg hurt.
The wound was deep.
Well, it's her own silly fault
if she misses her tea party...
...not yours.

No, nor mine neither.
It's enough to drive anybody back to drink.
They put wicked wooden contraptions
around our necks...
...so we couldn't even turn our heads
to lick our wounds.
After that...
...my lady never called for Ginger again.
I, on the other hand...
...continued to be subject
to her every whim.
Look, man, look!
Got a job for us then, Reuben?
Yes. It's stood out in all weathers.
Between that and the roads up there.
Plenty of rot here.
Plenty of rot everywhere.
What do they want to do?
Me lady craves a new coat of paint.
I believe your lady could use
a good deal more than a new coat of paint.
Amen.
Keep the horse for me, will you?
Best leave it saddled.
I daren't be late.
Where are you going then?
I'll be back later.
Listen.
There's a loose shoe.
Where are you going?
You mustn't ride him, Mr. Smith.
Now stand up, will you?
He's standing.
Come on, there. Come on.
Now stand up.
Where's your head?
Get out of the way!
Come on.
He pushed me...
...and pushed me...
...and pushed me!
What was the matter with him?
I was losing my shoe...
...but he had lost his mind!

My body couldn't escape...
...but my thoughts could.
They took me away from that awful place.
Far away.
But there was Reuben...
...still lying where he'd fallen.
I stayed with him.
My mother had taught me to be loyal,
no matter what.
Good Lord, what's happened here?
Roll him over.
See if we can get him to his feet.
I'll carry him.
Every step was agony.
I didn't know if my knees would ever heal.
We don't get to choose the people
in our lives.
For us, it's all chance.
Come on.
Come on, get on. Get on!
He won!
Lovely ride, son.
Thank you, Mama.
Good God, George.
What have you done to the horse?
Didn't you bother to train her?
I won the race.
You've broken her.
She can't breathe properly.
Ginger loved jumping.
Her heart leapt at every fence.
But they raced her before she was fit...
...and it shattered her.
They used to be such beautiful animals.
Now just look at them. Ruined.
A 12-month run should bring back
the mare's wind, my lord.
Well, the black one will have to be sold.
I won't have knees like that in my stables.
Sold?
Every horse knows that terrifying word.
When they came to take me away,
it was so sudden...
...that Ginger and I didn't even

get to say goodbye.
The terrible man who bought me
kept horses for rent.
Suck it in!
I was rented out to anyone who wanted
to hire me.
I was glad my friends couldn't see me now.
They wouldn't even have known me.
We hated that man.
You missed me, you stupid beasts.
This horse is 20 if it's a day.
This lively place lifted my spirits.
I'll meet you after the fair, Joe.
Wait!
I know who that is.
It's Joe!
Older, taller...
...but it's him!
Where'd he go?
- What happened to his knees?
- Stop!
- He took a spill in the stalls.
- A spill?
What are you doing? Where's Joe?
There he is.
Let me go!
Lively one, isn't he?
Joe, don't leave!
I'm here!
Horses for sale!
Twenty-five guineas, he's yours.
Fifteen.
- Eighteen.
- Sixteen.
- Eighteen!
- Seventeen, not a penny more.
Done!
How are you supposed to get through?
There were too many people.
There was too much noise.
The smell was awful.
Coming through. There's a lad.
Where was the grass?
Where were the trees?

Excuse me.
It was cramped...
...and damp...
...and dank and dark and dreary.
Jerry, what's wrong with him?
He's frightened.
Step up.
Let me go. I want to go and pet him.
Give me a brush, Dolly. Don't worry.
Harry, put some straw in that stall.
Dolly, no!
It's all right.
Come on. Let's do it quietly.
Give him a chance.
Up we go. There we are.
Thank you.
It's like baby fur here.
He's so soft.
Yeah, he is.
Come on, Pol, give us a hand.
How's it going with that straw?
All ready.
Go and get yourself a brush, then.
There.
He's not so frightened now.
And when he has to pull the cab?
Have faith.
I listened quietly.
What should we call him?
Jack. After the old one.
He's far blacker than Jack.
When's he's cleaned,
his color comes up lovely.
- Seeing something in him now, are you?
- I didn't say that.
All right.
We'll call you Black, because you are,
and Jack, after the old one.
And altogether, Black Jack,
because the odds are stacked...
...against us both.
Black Jack.
What you got?
Black Jack wants to be pretty.

Good idea.
All at once, I had hope.
It's good people that make good places.
Still, I wondered
what tomorrow would bring.
Walk on. Come on. That's it.
Walk on.
- Babaloo's Food Emporium.
- Rat problem solved.
Vermin exterminated!
Easy, boy.
Hello, Jerry! Have you got a good one?
Great one!
He's too black!
Be good for a funeral!
Good lad. Come around.
Braids on his mane and tail?
What? Are you going on a parade
this afternoon, Jerry?
He wanted to be pretty for his first day.
"Pretty for his first day?"
Did you hear that, lads?
Well, he's a regular dandy.
A bit like meself.
Why shouldn't you be?
Don't worry.
No worry, old Black, old Jack, old boy.
It's all right.
Jerry's hands.
The quiet of them...
...gave me confidence.
We spent our days
at one cab stand or another...
...collecting passengers.
It was a hard life.
The streets are hard on a horse's feet.
The cab is hard on a horse's back.
But I was lucky.
I had Jerry. We were in it together.
- Morning.
- Morning, Dinah.
Cabby!
There you go, Jerry.
Cabby!

- You all right, dear?
- Yes, I'm all right.
Let's get these up quickly.
You'll get run over.
Look sharp!
Put on the steam and get us to Victoria

by 10:

We'll take you, but at the regular pace.
It'll mean a shilling extra.
At the regular pace.
I'm your man. I'll get you there in time.
It's against his conscience to work
his horse into a sweat, but not mine.
Make way.
Coming through!
Get up. Get up!
Easy, easy, peasy, little gee-gee.
You all right, Dinah?
I'm still in one piece, Jerry.
Bonkers, all of them.
Coming through!
Dinah Brown's mother...
...she's in a bad way.
Poor Dinah.
She can't even go to her.
The place is in the country...
...and there are no trains on Sunday.
The horse is tired, Polly. I'm tired.
It's our one day of rest.
But oughtn't we treat folks...
...the way we like to be treated?
You're giving me my Sunday sermon
early today.
I know if my mother was dying...
A lighter cart would make
a wonderful difference to the horse.
Look!
Here comes butcher Dawes now
to lend you his light trap.
You're a clever woman.
All right.
Fix me some bread and cheese
and I'll get ready.

Feel free to tie your horse with the cows.
The meadow belongs to us,
not to the estate.
I'd rather set him loose. It'd be a real treat
for him to have a turnout.
Kind to me, kind to the horse...
Run inside and see your mother.
You're a tough one, Jerry.
How can a person ever repay you?
Here we go.
Here we go.
Grass!
Not a cobblestone in sight.
I couldn't believe my eyes.
Now, where's that biscuit?
Running made me very happy.
Why shouldn't Jerry be happy too?
I want that!
Give it to me!
Give it here!
Right.
Thanks.
The visit to the country refreshed me.
But I found I couldn't stop thinking of her.
Then as if by magic...
...there she was.
My beautiful Ginger.
Oh, God, she was skin and bones.
What had they done to her?
She was almost too weak
to know who I was.
It's me, Ginger.
It's me.
The brightness was gone
from her beautiful eyes.
Her face, once so full of spirit,
was now full of suffering.
I tried to comfort her.
I wanted her to know she wasn't alone.
Don't give up, Ginger.
Get up!
Get on with you.
My precious friend.
That night, I dreamed of her.

I dreamed of what was.
And I dreamed of what might have been.
I'm here.
What is it?
And then I knew.
Goodbye, my sweet one.
Just be patient.
It's ladies and gents who pay our rent.
They'll be out anytime now, you'll see.
Begging your pardon, sir,
I was engaged to come round at 9:00.
As it's after midnight,
perhaps they wouldn't-
You'll be wanted soon enough.
The party's nearly over.
We waited for our passengers.
And waited.
People aren't thoughtless just to horses.
They're also cruel to each other.
Bless your heart, old man.
Good night.
Get a move on!
It's freezing.
Just in a moment, sir.
Don't be impertinent. We could've had
two more drinks "in a moment."
Walk on.
Something was the matter.
Jerry always looked after me.
But here was the boy instead.
Harry, I didn't want to trouble them
in the house.
How's your dad?
It's in his lungs, Mr. Crenshaw.
I'm very sorry.
Doctor says he'll tell Mom tonight.
He says Dad can't drive cabs no more.
Keep your chin up.
Help your mom.
Never drive a cab again?
How could that be?
It was good to be outside.
I wanted to go back to work.
No, Black.

We're not going to the cab stand.
We're just stretching your old legs,
old Jack.

- Morning, Dinah.

- Morning, Harry. Is your mama home?
Dolly, what do you think you're doing?
Packing. We're moving to the country.
Daddy's going to drive coaches. Dinah
says he'll never have to drive a cab...
...ever again.

What would happen now?
Even though cab work had taken its toll
on me...
...I had hoped to spend
the rest of my days with Jerry.
Goodbye...
...beautiful Black.

Daddy said to give you a kiss for him.
I was sent to a grain dealer, where
Jerry expected me to be treated fairly.
But what he expected and what was...
...were as different as a kind word is
from a whiplash.

Come on!
For two long years,
I pulled the heavy carts...
...until I could not pull anymore.
Sixteen guineas for the pair.
Wants you to ride and drive.
Sixteen guineas.
Who'll give me sixteen guineas?
Anybody out there?
Sixteen guineas for the pair.
It's not worth bothering about them.
There's nothing for them
but the butcher's knife.
I was too weak to care.
Awful.

Was that one a carriage horse, Granddad?
He might have been anything.
He has a finer build than the other horses.
Wouldn't you say, Joe?
Poor old thing.
Expect we'll have better luck next month

at Langley.
That voice.
It woke me up.
I knew that voice.
It was Joe!
Black Beauty.
I'm here, Beauty.
I'm here.
You're safe now.
I have now lived in
this happy place a whole year.
My strength and spirits are back.
Joe promises me I'll never be sold.
My troubles are over...
...and I am at home.
Often...
...I fancy I'm still in the big pasture
at Birtwick Park.
I'm together with my old friends.
And nothing...
...will ever separate us again...
...ever.