

## Black Beauty

### Chapter 20 A Thief

My new master lived alone in a small house. He was a businessman, and his doctor told him that horseback riding would be good for his health. He rented a stable near the house and hired a man named Filcher as my groom. My master knew very little about horses, but he treated me well. He ordered the best hay with plenty of oats, crushed beans and bran. I heard the master order this food, and I thought I was well off.

For a few days everything was fine. The groom kept the stable clean, and he washed and brushed me. After a while I noticed that my food was not just right. I had beans and bran, but there were not many oats. In two or three weeks this began to show. I became weak and depressed, but there was no way I could tell anyone what was happening to me. This went on for months, and I wondered by my master did not notice that something was wrong. One afternoon he rode out into the country to see a friend of his. This friend knew a great deal about horses. After he welcomed his friend, he looked at me and said:

“It seems to me that your horse does not look too well. I hate to say anything, but it looks as though he has not been eating properly.”

My master explained that he had ordered the best food for me. Both men thought for a moment, and then my master realized that something was happening to my food.

If I could have spoken, I would have told my master where my oats went. My groom used to come every morning with a little boy who carried a covered basket. They would go into the harness-room and fill a little bag with my oats, and then the boy would go home.

Five or six days after our visit with my master’s friend, just as the boy left the stable, the door was pushed open and a policeman stood holding the child by the arm. the boy looked frightened and tried to call out. The policeman made him show them where the oats were kept and how he filled up his basket every morning.

They soon found Filcher and brought both him and the boy to prison. I heard later that the boy was released, but Filcher was locked up for two months.

## Chapter 21 A Horse Fair

After this experience with Filcher, my master hired a new groom. On the surface he seemed like a good enough fellow who liked horses. But as the days went by, he began to neglect my care. He rarely exercised me, and he went for weeks without cleaning my stable. After a while, I developed a bad infection in my hooves from standing in the damp and dirty stable.

Mr. Barry was so disgusted with the behavior of his two grooms that he decided it was too much trouble to keep a horse.

A few days later I found myself up for sale at a horse fair. A horse fair may be fun for people, but it is very serious business for a horse. I was put with two or three other strong, useful-looking horses, and a good many people came to look at us.

The first thing they did was to pull my mouth open, then to look at my eyes, then feel all the way down my legs, and give me a hard feel of the skin and flesh. Some people did this in a rough, careless way, and others would take care to pat me gently and talk to me in a soft voice.

There was one man I hoped would buy me. He was small and well built. His eyes were a soft gray, and he spoke to me in a kind and gentle voice.

He offered a good price for me but it was refused. I looked after him, but he was gone. Next, a hard-looking man with a loud voice came. I was very afraid he would buy me, but luckily, he walked away. One or two men came by, but they did not make an offer. Then the hard-faced man came back and began to bargain for me. Just then the gray-eyed man returned. I reached my head out towards him. He stroked my nose and offered the salesman more money than the hard-faced man.

The money was paid on the spot, and my new master took my halter and led me out of the fair. He fed me oats and stood by while I ate. He fed me oats and stood by while I ate. He talked to me for a while; then we started on our way home.

After a long ride, my owner pulled up at a small house and whistled. The door flew open, and a young woman followed by a little girl and boy ran out. There was a lively greeting as my rider dismounted.

The next minute they were all standing around patting me and talking to me in sweet voices. It felt good to be in this place!

## Chapter 22 A City Cab Horse

My new master's name was Jeremiah Baker, but everyone called him Jerry. His wife's name was Polly, and she was a handsome woman with smooth, dark hair, dark eyes, and a merry little mouth. They had two children, a boy of twelve, and a girl named Dolly who was eight. They all loved each other very much, and I had never seen such a happy family before. Jerry drove a cab in the cit. I was to pull the carriage with his other horse, who was name Captain.

On the first morning in my new home, I was visited by Polly and Dolly. They seemed eager to get to know me and to make friends. It was a great to be petted and talked to again. They brought me little apples and pieces of bread. They both thought I was very handsome and wondered how my knees had been so badly damaged.

In the afternoon I was put into the cab for the first time. Jerry was very careful to see that the collar and bridle fitted comfortably. There was no check-rein and no need to stand with my head held too high. Jerry was proud of me and showed me off to the other cab drivers. Many of them thought that there must be something wrong with me since I was such a fine-looking horse. But Jerry only smiled and stroked my neck.

The first week of pulling the cab was very hard for me. I was not used to the city noise and traffic. But I soon found that I could trust Jerry, and I slowly got used to all the confusion and the busy streets.

In a very short time Jerry and I understood each other as well as horse and man can. He made the stables as comfortable as possible and fed Captain and me very well. But the best thing about being a cab horse was having our Sunday rest. Captain and I worked so hard during the week that Sunday was a special time for us. We had a chance to relax and to enjoy each other's company. In a short time, we became good friends, and I learned all about my new stable mate. Our friendship grew, and I soon came to love my new home and feel like my old self again.