

Black Beauty

Chapter 23 Jerry Baker

I never knew a better man than my new master. He was kind and good, and always stood up for what he believed in. He was so good tempered that very few people could pick a quarrel with him. Jerry could not bear wasting time, and the one thing that could make him angry was people who wanted him to whip the horses to run faster, so that they would not be late for an appointment.

One afternoon, two wild-looking young men came out of a tavern and called to Jerry:

“Here cabby! Look sharp, we are late. If you get us to the station in time for the one o’clock train, we’ll reward you well.”

Jerry explained that he would take them at a safe pace, and he would ask only for the regular fare. The men thought for a moment and decided to give Jerry a chance.

It is always difficult to drive fast in a city in the middle of the day when the streets are full of traffic. But when a good driver and a good horse work together, it is amazing what they can do. Jerry and I were used to the busy, crowded streets, and no one could top us at getting through when we set our minds on it. Although things were jammed up that particular day, Jerry and I wove skillfully through the traffic and arrived at the station with five minutes to spare. Our passengers were quite happy and relieved that they had made their train.

“Thank god we are on time,” said one of the men, “and thank you, too, my friend and your good horse. You have saved us more than money can pay for.”

The young man offered Jerry extra money, but my master remained true to his word and refused it. He helped the young men with their baggage and watched as they disappeared into the crowded station. It was a good feeling to know that we had used our skills to help these two young men. Jerry wondered out loud what could have been so important about that particular train.

That evening, as Jerry brushed me and gave me some warm oats, he told dolly and Polly about our ride through the city traffic. They laughed when they began to think of why the young men were in such a hurry. But they were serious when they patted my head and thanked me for getting Jerry and the passengers to the station safely.

Chapter 24 Poor Ginger

One day, while our cab and many others were waiting outside one of the parks, a shabby old cab drove up beside ours. The horse was an old worn-out chestnut, with an ill-kept coat and bones that showed plainly through it. Her knees knuckled over, and her forelegs were very unsteady. I had been eating some hay, and the wind rolled a little of it toward her. The poor creature put out her long, thin neck and picked it up, and then turned and looked around for more. There was a hopeless look in a dull eye that I could not help noticing. I was thinking that I had seen that horse before, when she looked at me and said, “Black Beauty, is that you?”

It was Ginger! But she was so different! The beautifully arched and glossy neck was now straight and sunken in. Her clean straight legs were swollen, and the joints were grown out of shape with hard work. Her face was full of suffering and pain.

She came close to me and told me her sad story.

After a twelve-month run in the field where I had last seen her, she was considered to be fit for work again and was sold to a new master. For a little while she got on very well, but after a longer gallop than usual, the old strain returned. After a short rest, she was sold again. She had a few more owners, and finally she was sold to a man who kept cabs and horses and rented them out.

“When they found out my weakness, they said I was not worth what they paid for me and that I must go on one of the small cabs and just be used up. And that is what they are doing. They whip me and work me, without ever thinking of what I am feeling. I never even get a Sunday rest,” she said sadly.

“But you used to stand up for yourself when you were badly treated,” I said.

“Ah!” she said. “I did one, but it’s no use. Men are stronger, and if they are cruel and have no feelings there is nothing that we can do. I suppose we can only bear it-bear it on and on until we are dead. I wish I was dead now, so that I would not have to suffer another day of this terrible life.”

I was very upset and sad beyond words. I put my nose up to hers, but I could say nothing to comfort her. I think she was happy to see me, for she said:

“You are the only friend I ever had.”

Just then her driver came up, and with a tug at her mouth, he backed her out of the cab line and drove off.

A short time after this a cart with a dead horse in it passed our cab-stand. The head hung out of the cart, and the lifeless tongue was slowly dripping blood. The sight was horrible! It was a chestnut horse with a long, thin neck. I saw a white streak down the forehead. I think it was Ginger. In a way I hoped it was, for then her troubles would be over. Oh, if people were really kind, they would shoot us before we came to such misery.