

## **Black Beauty**

### **Chapter 27** Hard Times

As I grew more depressed in my new home, my strength and health began to fail. I was no longer able to do my share of the heavy work, so I was sold again.

My new master owned a fleet of cabs. He was a cruel-looking man with black eyes and a hooked nose. His mouth was hard and unsmiling, and his voice was as harsh as the grinding of cart wheels over graveled stones. His name was Nicholas Skinner. I have heard people say that seeing is believing; but I would say that feeling is believing. For up until this time I never knew the utter misery of a cab horse's life.

Skinner owned a fleet of shabby cabs, and they were driven by second-rate drivers. He was hard on the men, and they in turn were hard on the horses. In this place, we were given no Sunday rest and had to work long hours in the scorching heat of the summer.

Sometimes on a Sunday morning, I had to drive a group of men out to the country. They would insist upon driving up and down steep hills as fast as possible. After these rides, I was so fevered and worn that I could hardly touch my food. How I longed for the nice bran mash that Jerry used to give me on hot summer nights! I often thought about the cool meals and the Sunday rests that would make my work easier. But in this new job there were no rests and no good food. My new drive was as hard as his master. He had a cruel whip with something so sharp at the end of it that it sometimes drew blood. He would even whip me under the belly and flip the lash out at my head. All these things made me feel as if life was not worth living. I missed the kind words and soft caresses I had while I lived with Jerry and his family. Here, I was treated as if I was a machine, rather than a living animal with feelings.

My life was now so miserable that I thought many times of Ginger. I too wished I would simply drop dead at my work and be out of my misery. And one day my wish almost came true.

I went on the stand at eight in the morning and had done a good share of work when we had to take a man to the train station. After the man had boarded the train, my driver decided to wait around for some more business. Within a very short time a family of four approached us and asked the driver if we

2

could take them into town. They had a lot of heavy luggage, and while the father began loading the cab, the young girl came around to look at me.

"Papa," she said, "I am sure this poor horse cannot take us and all our bags so far. He looks so weak and worn out, just look at him."

“Oh, he’s all right, miss,” said my driver. “He is stronger than he looks.”

The girl’s father looked doubtful, but my driver was so eager to show him that I could do the job that he began to load the heaviest trunks onto the cab. I could hear the springs in the cab strain as he piled on more and more luggage.

The load was very heavy, and I had had neither food nor rest since early that morning. But I did my best, in spite of cruelty and injustice. I was moving along fairly well until we came to a steep hill. My own exhaustion and the heavy load proved to be too much. I was struggling to keep going, driven on by constant lashes from the whip, when all of a sudden, my feet slipped out from under me. I fell to the ground. I lay perfectly still, and I had no power to move. I thought that this was my time to die. There was a confusion around me, and I heard loud, angry voices and the sounds of luggage being unloaded. It was all like a dream. I thought I heard that sweet voice saying:

“Oh, that poor horse! It is all our fault!”

Someone came around and loosened the strap of my bridle and undid the collar. I heard someone say, “He is dead. He’ll never get up again.” Then I could hear a policeman giving orders, but I did not even open my eyes. I could only draw a gasping breath now and then. Some cold water was thrown over my head, and some liquid was poured into my mouth. I was covered with a blanket, and I lay there on the cold street for a long time. Soon I felt my life returning. A kind-voiced man was patting me and encouraging me to rise.

After one or two attempts, I staggered to my feet and was gently led to some stables which were nearby. Here, I was put into a comfortable stall and given some warm food.

In the evening I was well enough to be led back to my owner’s stables. Early the next morning Mr. Skinner came to look at me.

“This horse has had it,” he said. “If we could give him a rest for six months, he would be able to work again, but I have no time or money to nurse sick horse. My plan is to work them as long as I can, and then sell them for as much as I can.”

So Mr. Skinner decided to give me ten days of rest and good food so that I might look my best for the horse fair.

### 3

#### **Chapter 28** Farmer Thoroughgood and His Grandson

At this fair I found myself in with all the old broken-down horses. Some were lame, some broken-winded, some old, and some that I am sure it would have been merciful to shoot.

The buyers and sellers did not look much better off than the poor horses. There were poor old men trying to get a horse or a pony for a small amount of money. And there were

men trying to sell a worn-out beast for a few dollars. Poverty had hardened these men, and I longed to hear a kind human voice I could trust.

I noticed a man who looked like a farmer. He had a young boy at his side. The farmer had a broad back and round shoulders, his face was kind, and he wore a broad-brimmed hat. When he came up to me, I saw a flicker in his eye. I pricked up my ears and looked at him.

“There’s a horse, Willie, that has known better days,” he said. “Oh yes, my boy, he must have been something when he was young.”

He put out his hand and gave me a kind pat on the neck. I put out my nose in answer to his kindness. The boy stroked my face.

“Poor old fellow! See, Grandpa, see how well he understands kindness. Could you buy him and make him young again like you did with Ladybird?”

The boy’s grandfather explained that Ladybird had not been an old horse, just a run-down and badly used one. But the boy insisted that I too could not be that old, and that I was just worn out and in need of a good rest.

The farmer laughed and felt my legs, which were swollen and strained. He looked at my mouth and soon agreed with his grandson. He offered a few dollars for me, and he and his grandson led me away.

The farmer’s name was Mr. Thoroughgood. He gave me to the care of his grandson, Willie. I was given hay oats every night and morning and the run of the meadow during the day. Willie brought me carrots and spent many hours standing by me and petting me.

I improved steadily. By the spring my legs were well again, and I pulled Willie and his grandfather all the way to town in a fine carriage. Farmer Thoroughgood was very pleased and proud. He and Willie talked it over and decided to find me a good home where I would be loved and valued.

## 4

### Chapter 29 My Last Home

One day during the summer the groom cleaned and brushed me with such care that I knew some change was about to happen. Willie was anxious and excited as he got into the carriage with his grandfather. “If the women like him,” said the old man, “they will be happy and so will he.”

We traveled for a mile or two until we reached a small house with a lawn and trees in the front. Willie rang the bell, and three elderly women came out of the house. They seemed lively and excited to meet me. One of them, named Miss Ellen, took to me at once. They asked

Mr. Thoroughgood many questions about me. He told them that I had been overworked and treated badly, but I was now in fine condition and only needed good treatment and a lot of kindness. The women talked it over and decided to keep me for a while to see how I worked out. Willie gave me a big hug, and his grandfather patted me goodbye. I was led to my new stable and fed warm food. Soon, a groom came to look me over. He stared at me for a minute and said:

“That star on his face is just like the one Black Beauty had. He is the same height too.”

So he came to the place in my neck where I had been given an injection a long time ago. He began talking to himself in disbelief.

“White star on the forehead, one white foot, that little patch of white hair on the back. It must be Black Beauty! Beauty! Do you remember me? I’m Joe Green. I was just a boy when I almost killed you by forgetting to cover you on that cold night!”

He began patting me and he was overjoyed. I was very happy, and I put my nose up to him and tried to say that we were friends. I never saw a man so pleased.

I have not lived in this happy place for a whole year. Joe is the best and kindest groom I ever had. My strength and spirit grow every day. Willie and Mr. Thoroughgood come to visit me often, and the women have promised never to sell me. My troubles are all over, and I am finally at home.