

CHAPTER 2

SQUIRE GORDON AND HIS FAMILY LIVED AT BIRTWICK PARK. His groom led me past a large iron gate and we went down a long road with tall trees on both sides. The house was surrounded by lovely gardens filled with pretty flowers. We went past the apple trees and the pens until we arrived at the stables.

Once we were there, the groom jumped off my back, took off my saddle and bridle and led me inside the stables. Squire Gordon kept many horses and carriages in beautiful stalls that were large and clean.

The groom led me to the first stall; it was very large and there was lots of room for me to move around freely. He did not tie me up and I liked it very much. He brushed my coat and then gave me some fresh water to drink and nice oats. He patted me and said kind words before he went away to continue his work.

I ate my nice oats and then I looked around. In the stall next to mine there was a fat, grey pony with a thick mane and tail and a pretty head.

'How do you do?' I said. 'What's your name?'

'My name is Merrylegs,' he said. 'I am very handsome as you can see! The children ride me, and Miss Jessie and Miss Flora love me very much. I'm their favourite! Are you going to live next door to me?'

'Yes; I think so,' I said.

'I hope you have good manners,' he said. 'I don't like horses that bite!'

Just then, I heard a neigh. It came from a tall reddish-brown mare near Merrylegs. She was very pretty but seemed angry. 'It isn't good manners to take the stall of another horse,' she said as she looked at me over the stall.

'I'm sorry,' I said. 'Is this your stall?'

'Yes, it is,' she said. 'They moved me so that you could take it!'

'I'm sorry, but I didn't ask anyone to do that; the groom put me here,' I said.

In the afternoon, when she went out, Merrylegs told me about



her. 'The thing is that Ginger has a bad habit. She bites people,' he said. 'She bit James, the stable boy, on the arm and now the children are afraid to come to the stables. They used to bring me nice apples and carrots to eat. I miss them!'

'Why does she bite people?' I asked.

'Ginger's old master was unkind to her, and that's why she bites,' said Merrylegs. 'But everyone here is very kind. There is no reason to bite! Squire Gordon doesn't use whips; John Manly is an excellent groom and James the stable boy is very kind too! Ginger has no reason to bite.'

The next day I met the groom, John Manly, again. He brushed my coat and made me look very handsome. He put a saddle and bridle on my back and took me for a ride. He was a very good and careful rider, and I enjoyed galloping with him. As we were returning to the stables, we met the Squire and Mrs Gordon, who were walking together.

John pulled the reins and we stopped. 'Well, John, how is he?' asked the squire.

'He is a good horse, Squire! He is fast, obedient and gentle, too,' said John. 'He isn't scared of sudden noises and he is careful and quiet. From what it seems, they taught him well and treated him with kindness.'

'Very well,' said Squire Gordon. 'I'll ride him tomorrow.'

The next day Squire Gordon rode me just as he promised. I remembered my mother's important advice and tried hard to please my new master. He was a good rider and thoughtful about me, too.

When we got home, Mrs Gordon was waiting for us. 'What is he like, dear? Did you enjoy your ride?' she asked.

'He's exactly as John says,' said Squire Gordon. 'I couldn't hope for a better horse.'

'What shall we call him?' he asked.

Mrs Gordon looked at me. 'Well, he is really very handsome,' she said. 'Let's call him Beauty. And look at his shiny black colour. Why don't we call him Black Beauty?'

'Yes, that's a very good name,' he said.

A few days later, I had to pull the large carriage with Ginger. I was worried about how we would work together, but I was surprised to



find that she was a hard worker. We both trotted well and it was easy for us to pull the carriage together. We soon became great friends. She told me all about her difficult past and the years she spent at the hands of cruel people. It was no wonder that she was angry all the time.

But with the passing of time Ginger stopped biting. She was becoming kinder. The master said that it was 'Birtwick kindness'. There was no reason for her to bite or show bad manners because she was treated with kindness. I guess old Merrylegs is right when he says, 'Good places make good horses'.



CHAPTER 3

ONE AUTUMN DAY, JOHN MANLY TIED ME TO THE SMALL carriage. Squire Gordon came out of the house and John helped him to his seat so that we could take him into town for business.

I usually enjoyed pulling the small carriage but on that day it wasn't much fun; the ground was muddy and the wind had blown leaves in front of us, making it even more difficult to walk.

It began to rain again as we came to a little wooden bridge. The river was almost at the height of the bridge. 'Be careful,' said a man at the bridge. 'The weather is getting worse and the water in the river is rising very quickly.'

'I'll try and finish my business quickly,' said Squire Gordon as we arrived in the town. He left us outside an office as he went inside to do his business. We waited in the rain and cold wind.

'I'm sorry my business took me so long, John,' he said when he finally came outside. 'Come on, Beauty; let's go home as fast as we can.'

The weather was worse now. In the woods it was scary because the wind blew around big tree branches. The sound was terrifying.

'We must get out of these woods fast,' said Squire Gordon.

'Yes, sir,' said John. 'These branches seem very dangerous!'

Just then, we heard a crack and a crashing sound as one of the trees fell right in front of us. I stood still, even though I was frightened because I knew that I should not run away.

'That was close!' said Squire Gordon. 'What should we do now?'

'Well, sir, we can't go over the tree and we can't go round it; we must go back and try crossing the bridge again,' said John. 'We will be late, but it is the only thing we can do.'

Once we got to the bridge we saw that the water had reached the height of the bridge. 'Come on Beauty,' said John. 'Let's cross over fast!'

As soon as my hoof touched the first part of the bridge, I knew that something was wrong. I stood still. John touched me with the whip but I still refused to move.

CHAPTER 2

Comprehension

1 Decide if the following statements are True or False. Write T or F in the boxes.

- Squire Gordon lived alone at Birtwick Park.
- Everyone seemed to like Merrylegs.
- The groom had put Darkie into the wrong stall.
- The children believed that Ginger was dangerous.
- Squire Gordon was very pleased with his new horse.
- Mr Gordon gave Darkie a new name.

2 Choose the best answer.

- Birtwick Park was _____.
a. a stable
b. a house
c. a garden
- Merrylegs was _____.
a. a mare
b. a colt
c. a pony
- John Manly was _____.
a. a squire
b. a groom
c. a stable boy
- Ginger's colour was _____.
a. grey
b. black
c. red
- Black Beauty had to work with _____.
a. Ginger
b. Merrylegs
c. James

Vocabulary

3 Find the words in Chapter 2 to match the definitions below. The first letter has been given.

- Person who takes care of horses g _____ (page 8)
- A building/place where horses live s _____ (page 8)
- Female horse m _____ (page 8)

- Somebody who follows commands and orders, and listens to others o _____ (page 10)
- Thinking and caring about others t _____ (page 10)

4 Complete the sentences using the prepositions in the box.

from off away of by about for around up at

- The garden is surrounded _____ tall trees.
- The farmers are hoping _____ rain soon.
- Kay is worried _____ her maths exam.
- Let's go to the city centre and look _____ the shops.
- The boy jumped _____ the wall and ran down the street.
- I heard a noise but I didn't know where it came _____.
- Most people are scared _____ snakes; they can be dangerous.
- 'Go _____! I'm busy and cannot talk to you at the moment,' Robin said to his sister.
- We arrived _____ the station just as the train was leaving.
- The horses aren't tied _____; they're running freely in the field.

Follow-up activities

5 Discuss.

- How do you think Darkie felt when he first arrived at his new home? How do you feel when you do or start something new?
- Do you think Merrylegs and Darkie will become good friends? Why/Why not?
- Is it easy for you to make new friends? Why/Why not?
- What is your opinion of Squire and Mrs Gordon? Why?
- Merrylegs says that Ginger has a bad habit – biting. What bad habits can you think of that some people have? What annoys you the most?

6 Imagine that you are Mrs Gordon. Write a page in your diary about the day you saw Black Beauty. Describe him and say what made you give him that name. (60-80 words)