

Black Beauty

GINGER is a worn-out chestnut mare, once proud and beautiful. She has been sold many times and now works pulling a shabby cab. One day, lined up with other cab horses outside a park, she notices a particularly beautiful black cab horse and is sure that she recognises her from happier times.

GINGER: Black Beauty, is that you?

It's me. Ginger! I've changed a lot. You might find it hard to recognise me now... But I'd know you anywhere.

(Beauty sidles up to be closer and looks at her)

It seems so long ago that we were together. Where have you been? I can see that you've been treated well. It took me a year before they considered that I was fit for work. I stayed at Earlshall before they sold me off to a gentleman. *(Wistfully)* That was wonderful. He was good to me.

I would run and canter and gallop... in acres of fresh green countryside. *(Looking around her and trying to suppress a cough)* How I miss that now! Life was good for a while... as it must have been good for you.

(She edges away from Beauty)

Things didn't work out though. One day, after a longer gallop than usual the old strain returned. I was no longer any use to the gentleman. He did look after me... got me medical help and allowed me to rest... but then he sold me. In this way I changed hands several times, but always getting lower down. No smart cabs for me!

(Looking around her and moving back towards Beauty, and suppressing another bout of coughing)

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You look well off, and I am glad of it, but I could not tell you what my life has been. When they found out my weakness they said I was not worth what they gave for me, and that I must go into one of the low cabs, and just be used up; that is what they are doing, whipping and working with never one thought of what I suffer – they paid for me, and must get it out of me, they say.

I used to stand up for myself if I was ever ill-used, but it's no use; men are strongest, and if they are cruel and have no feeling, there is nothing that we can do, but just bear it – bear it on and on to the end.

(Coughing again, and looking sadly at Beauty) I wish the end would come, I wish I was dead. I have seen dead horses, and I am sure they do not suffer pain; I wish I may drop down dead at my work, and not be sent off to the knackers.

You are the only friend I ever had.

Goodbye Beauty. Here comes my master.

(GINGER's driver comes up to lead her away. She jerks her head backwards and, with a newfound sense of pride, tosses her thin mane and painfully walks away. She stops and turns to have one last look at Beauty, but he tugs her mouth, and she walks off)

by Anna Sewell, adapted by LAMDA