

Part I

Chapter I

My Early Home

My first memory is of a large, beautiful meadow with



a crystal-clear pond in it. Water flowers grew in the deep end. On one side, we looked into a field over the bushes, which were neatly trimmed. On the other side, we looked over the gate to our master's house.

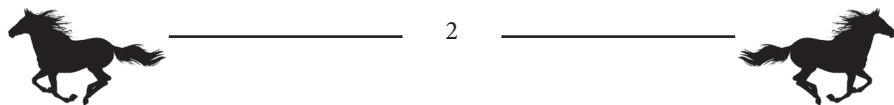
I lived on my mother's milk when I was young because I could not eat grass. So I ran next to her during the day and slept next to her at night. When it was sunny, we spent time by the pond in the shade of the trees. When it was cold, we kept warm in a comfortable shed.

As soon as I was old enough to eat grass, my mother used to go to work in the daytime and come back in the evening.

There were six young horses in the meadow, including me. They were much older than I was. Some were nearly as large as adult horses. I ran with them, and it was fun. We used to gallop in the field. They were always biting, kicking, and galloping.

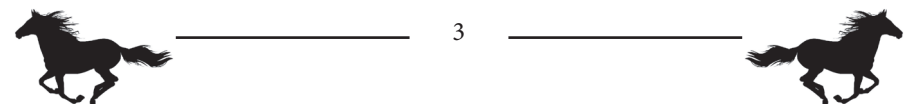
One day when there was a lot of fighting, my mother said to me, "Come here and listen to me. The horses here are excellent horses, but they're carthorses. You're different. Your father has a good reputation here. Your grandfather was a champion at Newmarket, and he won the Newmarket Cup for two years. Your grandmother was the kindest horse I've ever met. I'm certain you've never seen me kick or bite."

I've never forgotten the advice of my mother. I knew she was a wise old horse, and our master thought the world of her. Her name was Duchess, but he called her Pet.



Our master was a kind, gentle man. He gave us good food, a nice place to live, and comforting words. He spoke to us as kindly as he did to his own children. Everyone liked him, and my mother loved him deeply.

Patting and stroking her, he would ask, "All right, old



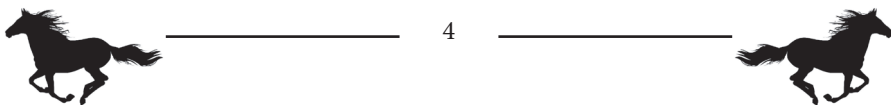
Pet, and how's your little Darkie doing?"

I was referred to as Darkie because I was a dull black. Once the master gave me a piece of bread that was very pleasant, and occasionally he'd bring a carrot for my mother. I think we were his favorites.

There was a boy who plowed the fields named Dick. He often came to pick blackberries from the bushes in our field. After he ate what he wanted, he would throw stones and sticks at us. He thought it was fun. We didn't care because we could gallop away, but sometimes a stone hit us, and it hurt.

One day, Dick was throwing stones at us, not knowing the master was in the next field watching. So the master jumped over the bushes and grabbed Dick by his shoulder. He smacked Dick so hard that he cried out in pain. We stepped closer to see what was going on.

"Bad boy to chase the horses!" said the master. "It's not the first or second time, but it will be the last. So there, take your money, and go home. You're not welcome on my farm." So we never saw Dick again.



Chapter 2

The Hunt

Before I was two, something happened that I will never forget. It was early spring. A light mist still covered the land. As I was eating grass in the lower field, I heard what sounded like the cry of dogs in the distance.

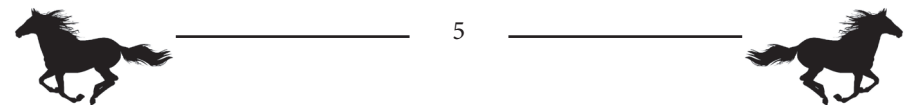
The oldest of the horses raised his head, pricked his ears, and said, "Here come the dogs!" and galloped off.

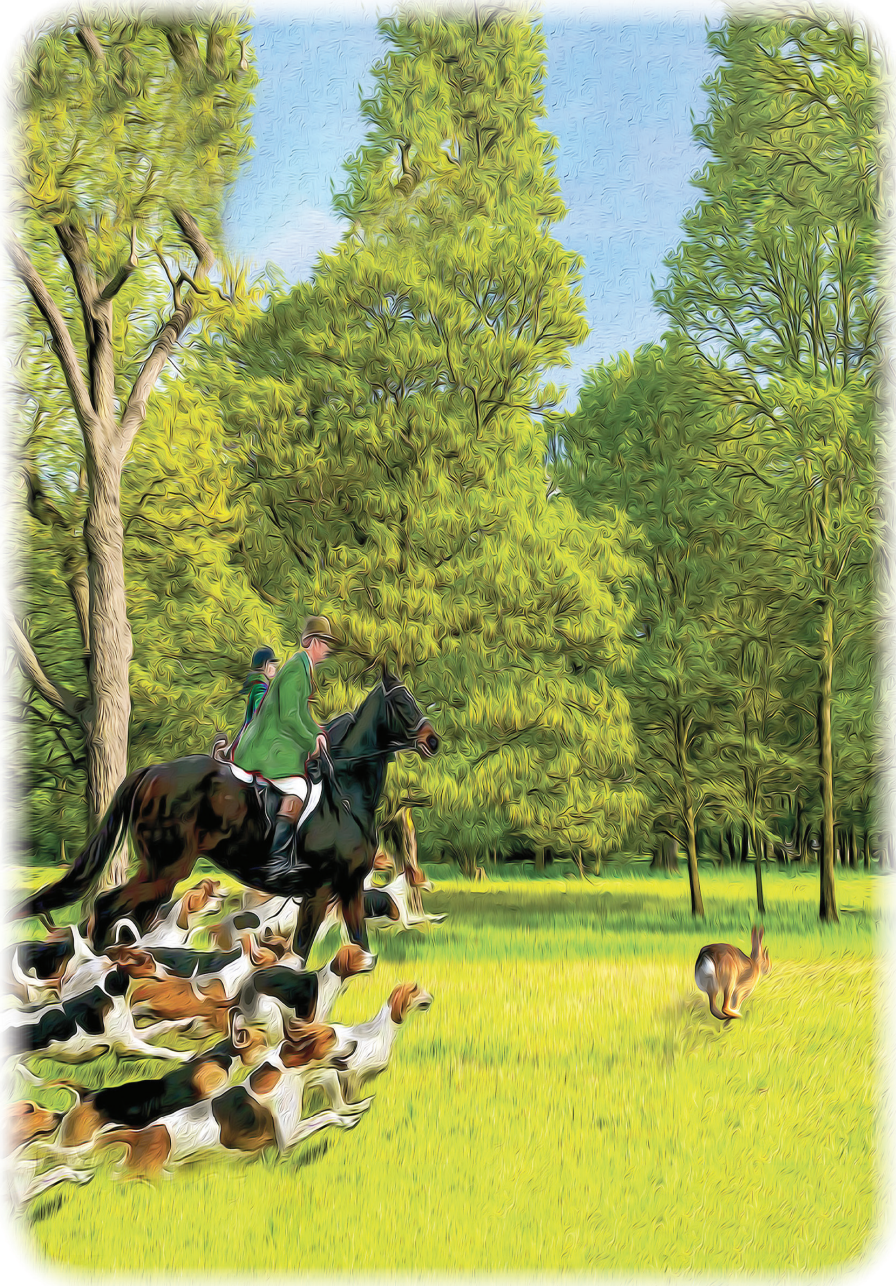
The rest of us followed to the upper part of the field. We could see for miles from where we were. My mother and our master's old horse were both nearby. They knew what was happening.

"They have found a rabbit," said my mother. "We'll see it soon."

And soon the dogs were running down the young wheat field next to us. I've never heard such a noise.

After that, a large number of horsemen came on horseback. A few of them were wearing green uniforms.





We wanted to run next to the old horses, but they quickly galloped into the surrounding fields. Then the dogs became quiet. They started to sniff the ground.

“They have lost the scent,” said the old horse. “The rabbit may run away.”

“What rabbit?” I asked.

“Oh! I don’t know what rabbit. Those men don’t care what rabbit it is. It’s probably one of our own rabbits from the woods.”

Soon the dogs began running at full speed towards our meadow.

“The chase is on!” yelled my mother.

The rabbit rushed to the woods, afraid. The dogs followed. They leapt the stream, dashed across the field, and jumped over the bank. Six or eight men leapt their horses clean over the bush, closing upon the dogs. The rabbit tried to escape, but it was too late. The dogs were on the little rabbit, and they were crying loudly. One scream was all the poor rabbit made. One of the huntsmen rode up and whipped the dogs. He held the rabbit up by her leg. She was torn and bleeding. All the gentlemen seemed pleased.

When I looked, there was a horrible sight in the brook. One of the horses was in the stream, while the other was in pain on the grass. One of the riders emerged covered in mud. The other remained totally still.

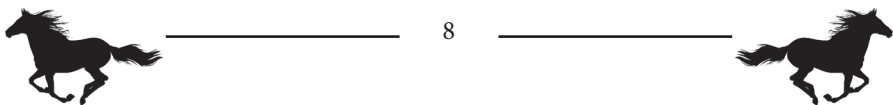
“The man’s neck is broken,” she said. “I’ve never fig-





ured out why men love this sport. They often hurt themselves, hurt good horses, tear up the fields. And it's all just to catch a rabbit, a fox, or a deer. Of course, they could get these animals easier in another way, but what do we know? We're only horses."

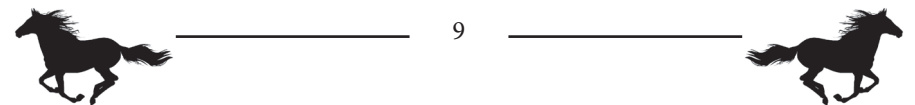
Riders rushed to the young man. My master, who had been watching what was going on, was the first to try to sit him up. The young man's head fell back. His arms hung down. Everyone looked worried. There was no noise. Even the dogs were quiet, seeming to know something was wrong. They carried the young man to our master's house. I heard afterward that it was young George Gordon. He was the squire's only son. He was a fine, tall young man and the pride of his family.



Mr. Bond, the veterinarian, examined the black horse that lay moaning on the grass. He discovered that one of the horse's legs was broken. Then someone ran to our master's house and came back with a gun. There was a loud bang and a horrible yell. Then everything was still. The black horse no longer moved.

My mother seemed troubled. She had known this horse for a long time. She said his name was Rob Roy. "He was a beautiful horse," she said. "He was never mean to anyone." My mother stood staring at Rob Roy's body for a long time.

After only a day or two, we noticed the church bell ringing for a long time. I looked over the gate. I saw a long, strange coach covered in black cloth being drawn by black horses. More coaches soon appeared, all of which were black. They carried young Gordon to the churchyard to bury him. He would never ride again. I never knew what they did with Rob Roy, but it was all for a little rabbit.



Chapter 3

My Breaking In

I was now beginning to grow handsome. My coat had matured and was dark black. I had one white foot and a pretty white diamond on my forehead.

When I was four, Squire Gordon came to see me. He checked my eyes, my mouth, and my legs. Then I had to walk, trot, and gallop before him.

He seemed to like me and said, “When he has been well broken in, he will do well.”

The master said he would break me in himself, as he didn’t want me to be scared or hurt. He began breaking me in the next day.

No one knows what breaking in is, so I will describe it. It means teaching a horse to wear a saddle and a bridle, and to carry a man, woman, or child on his back. To go exactly where the rider wants and to go quietly.

First, the horse must learn to wear a collar, a crupper, and a breeching. He must stand still while these are ap-



plied. Then a cart or a small carriage is put behind him so that he cannot walk or trot without dragging it behind him. He must go as fast or slow as his driver wants. He must stay focused the whole time. He must always follow orders, even if he is exhausted or hungry. The harness won’t let him lie down.

While riding in fields and lanes, I generally used a halter and headstall, but now I needed a bit and a bridle. My master gave me some oats as usual. After a good deal of convincing, he got the bit into my mouth, and the bri-

dle secured. The bit is awful! A large, thick piece of cold, hard steel is pushed into the mouth between the teeth and over the tongue. The ends come out at the corner of the mouth. These ends are held by straps that go over the head, under the throat, around the nose, and under the chin. It's impossible to get it off your head. In any case, my mother always wore one when she went out, and all horses I've ever known have worn one. And so, with kind words, soft oats, and gentle pats, I received my bit and bridle.

Then came the saddle. Old Daniel held my head while my master handled my back very gently. He fastened the girth and patted and talked to me while doing so. Then I had a few oats, and he led me about by the reins. He did this every day until I began to look for the oats and the saddle.

Finally, one morning, my master mounted me and rode me around the meadow on the soft grass. It certainly felt strange. But in the end, I was glad to be carrying my master, so I adjusted quickly to being mounted.

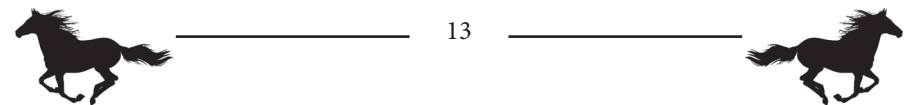
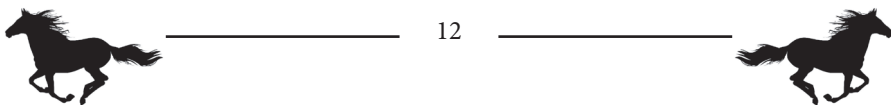
Next, he had to put on the horseshoes. That was challenging too. My master went with me to the blacksmith to make sure I was okay. The blacksmith worked on my feet one after the other, trimming my hooves. I stood on three legs because it didn't hurt me. And then he made a horseshoe in the shape of my foot and nailed it on. That way, the shoe was attached firmly to my hoof. My feet felt

heavy and stiff, but I soon became use to it.

Then my master broke me to harness. More new things to wear! First, a heavy, stiff collar was placed around my neck, with great sidepieces next to my eyes called blinkers. With these on, I could not see on either side. Next, a small saddle with a nasty, stiff strap went directly under my tail. That was the crupper. I hated the crupper. To have my long tail doubled up and poked through that strap was almost as bad as the bit. Although I wanted to kick my master, I could not. Eventually, I got used to it, and I could carry out my duties.

I must not forget to mention one part of my training, which I have always considered a great advantage. My master sent me to a nearby farmer. The farmer had a meadow bordering a railway on one side. In the meadow, I could run among the sheep and cows. I will never forget the first train that went by. While I was eating grass, I heard a strange sound in the distance. Before I knew where it came from, a long black train raced by and was gone just as quickly.

In astonishment and fear, I galloped as fast as I could to the other side of the meadow. Several other trains traveled through that day, moving at different speeds. These made an awful screeching and moaning sound as they approached the station. It was terrible, but the cows barely raised their heads when the large, black, noisy thing passed by.



When I saw that the train never entered the field or did me harm, I ignored it. After a few days, I completely forgot about the train sounds.

I've seen many horses get nervous when they hear or see a steam engine. But thanks to my good master's care, I'm as fearless at railway stations as in my own stable. So now, if anyone wants to break in a young horse, well, that is the way.



Chapter 4

Birtwick Park

It was early in May when a man came from Squire Gordon's and took me away to the hall.

My master said, "Goodbye, Darkie. Work hard, and do your best." I could not say goodbye, so I sniffed his hand. Finally, he patted me on the shoulder, and I left my first home.

As I lived some years with Squire Gordon, I may as well say something about the place. Birtwick is close to Squire Gordon's Park. A heavy, iron gate stood at the entrance of the road leading up to the house. The road was smooth, and clumps of tall trees grew alongside it. The garden and the house were separated by another huge gate. Beyond this was an old orchard, paddock, and stable. The stable in which I was placed had four spacious stalls. The large open window let in plenty of light and air.

The first stall was a large square behind a wooden gate. It had a rack for hay and a feeder for corn. It was

