CLASSICS LIBRARY · STORY MAP

Black Beauty

Anna Sewell · *1877* · *original English text*

A horse tells his own life, from a pleasant meadow through kind masters, the bearing rein, cab work, and cruelty, to a last quiet home. Sewell wrote to make people see that how we treat animals is a test of whether our religion is a sham.

THE CENTRAL QUESTION

If a horse can be used well or used to death, what does kindness require of those who have power over "dumb animals," and what becomes of a good creature in a hard market?

"there is no religion without love, and people may talk as much as they like about their religion, but if it does not teach them to be good and kind to man and beast it is all a sham"

John Manly · At Birtwick, after a conversation about a master's teaching

Beauty's early home and the Gordon household show what just mastery looks like. The bearing rein, drunken drivers, and overwork ruin Ginger and nearly ruin him. Jerry Barker's cab stand is a picture of hard, honest kindness in a city. The ending is not triumph in the world's eyes: it is rest. "My troubles are all over, and I am at home."

KEY CHARACTERS

Black Beauty
The narrator; a well-bred horse whose character is patience, memory, and a just sense of his drivers.

Ginger
A spirited mare ruined by hard use; her fate is the book's sharpest grief.

John Manly
Squire Gordon's coachman; a man whose religion is tested by kindness to beasts.

Squire and Mrs. Gordon
The first just masters of Beauty's working life.

Jerry Barker
A London cabman, good-tempered and firm, who keeps Sunday and will not overwork his horses for money.

Merrylegs
A pony at Birtwick, a cheerful companion of the early years.

Farmer Thoroughgood and Willie
The last rescuers, who see worth in a used-up horse.

RELIGION WITHOUT LOVE IS A SHAM

> *"there is no religion without love, and people may talk as much as they like about their religion, but if it does not teach them to be good and kind to man and beast it is all a sham"*
>
> **John Manly** · At Birtwick

> *"My troubles are all over, and I am at home"*
>
> **Black Beauty** · Chapter 49

Grades 3–5
Read the full text free at classicslaunch.org.

01

My Early Home, and Birtwick

PART I

Beauty learns good manners in a meadow, is broken in, and comes to Squire Gordon's, where John Manly and James are just men, and Ginger's temper is understood.

- The breaking-in includes the bit, the saddle, and the fear of training done without patience.
- Merrylegs and Ginger are his companions; Ginger has already known a hard hand.
- A fire at a hotel and a late-night run for the doctor test courage and obedience.

> *"there is no religion without love, and people may talk as much as they like about their religion, but if it does not teach them to be good and kind to man and beast it is all a sham"*
>
> **John Manly** · Part I, at Birtwick

02

Earlshall and the Bearing Rein

PART II

The household changes; Beauty is sold to a fashionable house where the bearing rein is fashion's cruelty. A fall and a new master begin his decline in the world's scale.

- The bearing rein forces a horse's head up for show and hurts the back and wind.
- Ginger fights and is broken in spirit; Beauty yields and is injured by a careless rider.
- A gentleman's stable may still be a place of vanity rather than care.

03

A London Cab Horse

PART III

Sold at a fair, Beauty becomes a cab horse for Jerry Barker: hard work, Sunday questions, and a master as good as John Manly. He sees poor Ginger one last time.

- Jerry will not take Sunday fares that break his rule of rest and worship.
- Seedy Sam and others show what the work does when a man is under the same pressure.
- Ginger is a worn cab horse; her end is a warning Beauty cannot forget.

04

Hard Times

PART III LATE–PART IV EARLY

Jerry falls ill; the cab work ends. Beauty is sold into worse hands, overworked, and finally collapses. Farmer Thoroughgood and Willie recognize a good horse under the wreck.

- Without a just master, the market treats a horse as a tool until it fails.
- A fall in the street is the bottom of his strength.
- A kind old farmer and a boy begin the last rescue.

05

My Last Home

PART IV, CHAPTERS 48–49

Beauty is sold to a family who will not sell him again. The story ends in rest, with a memory of Birtwick under the apple-trees.

- The ladies who buy him are the kind of mistresses the book has been asking for.
- He is promised he shall never be sold; fear can stop.
- The last sentence looks back, not forward, to the orchard of his first good home.

> *"My troubles are all over, and I am at home"*
>
> **Black Beauty** · Chapter 49, My Last Home, the close of the story

Mercy to Creatures · Just Mastery · Religion and Practice · Suffering · Home and Rest

What to watch for as you read

GRADES 3–5

1. The hosted text is the original English of Project Gutenberg #271, in four parts and 49 chapters.
2. John's line is that if religion "does not teach them to be good and kind to man and beast it is all a sham—all a sham, James."
3. The close is: "My troubles are all over, and I am at home; and often before I am quite awake, I fancy I am still in the orchard at Birtwick."
4. The bearing rein is a real fashionable cruelty in the story, not a vague hardship. Students should see how vanity can be dressed as style.
5. Sewell wrote for drivers and owners as much as for children. The book is a moral appeal, spoken from the horse's mouth.

Quotations are verbatim from the original English text, Project Gutenberg #271, the public-domain text hosted at classicslaunch.org/works/black-beauty/. Citations give book and chapter (or canto and line) so every line can be checked.