



My First Home

The first place that I remember well was a large, pleasant meadow with a clear pond. Some shady trees leaned over the pond; rushes and water lilies grew at its deep end. Looking over the hedge on one side of the meadow, we horses saw a plowed field. Looking over the hedge on the other side, we saw a gate at our master's house, which stood by the road. At the top of the meadow was a grove of fir trees; at the bottom, a running brook overhung by a steep bank.

When I was very young, I lived on my mother's milk. During the day, I ran by her side. At night I lay down beside her. When it was hot, we stood by the pond in the trees' shade. When it was cold, we stood in a nice warm shed near the grove. As soon as I was old enough to eat grass, my mother went to work during the day and came back each evening.

There were six colts in the meadow besides me. They were older than I was. Some were nearly as large as grown-up horses. I ran with them and had great fun. We galloped round and round the field as hard as we could. Sometimes we played roughly. Frequently the other colts playfully bit and kicked.

One day when there was much kicking, my mother whinnied to me to come to her. She said, "The colts who live here are good colts, but they're cart-horse colts, and they haven't learned good manners. You're a thoroughbred. Your father has a great name in these parts. Your grandfather won the Newmarket races twice. Your grandmother had the sweetest temper of any horse I ever knew. I never kick or bite. I hope you'll grow up gentle and good and never learn bad ways. Do your work willingly, lift your feet up well when you trot, and never bite or kick even in play."

I've never forgotten my mother's advice. I knew she was wise. Our master, Farmer Grey, thought a great deal of her. Her name was Duchess, but he often called her Pet.

Farmer Grey was a good, kind man. He gave us horses good food and good lodging. He spoke as kindly to us as he did to his little children. We all were fond of him. My mother loved him. Whenever she saw him at the gate, she'd neigh with joy and trot up to him. He'd pat and

stroke her and say, "Well, old Pet, how's your little Darkie?" I was black, so he called me Darkie. Then he'd give me a piece of bread, which was very good. Sometimes he gave my mother a carrot. All of the horses would come to him, but I think my mother and I were his favorites. On market days, my mother always took Farmer Grey into town in a light carriage.

Sometimes a plowboy named Dick would come into our field to pluck blackberries from the hedge. When he'd eaten all that he wanted, he'd have what he called "fun" with the colts, throwing stones and sticks at us to make us gallop. We colts didn't mind him too much because we could gallop off, but sometimes a stone would hit and hurt us. One day while Dick was at his "fun," Farmer Grey was in the next field, watching. He jumped over the hedge and, catching Dick by the arm, gave him such a box on the ear that Dick roared with pain. We trotted up nearer to see what was happening. "Bad boy!" Farmer Grey said. "Bad boy to harass the colts! This isn't the first or second time, but it will be the last. There—take your money and go home. I don't want you on my farm again." We never saw Dick again.

Old Daniel, the man who looked after the horses, was as gentle as Farmer Grey, so we were well-off.



The Hunt

Before I was two years old, something happened that I've never forgotten. It was early spring. There had been a light frost during the night. A fine mist hung over the woods and meadows. The other colts and I were feeding in the field's lower part when we heard the cry of dogs in the distance. The oldest colt raised his head, pricked his ears, said, "There are the hounds!" and cantered off. The rest of us followed him to the field's upper part, where we looked over the hedge and saw several fields beyond.

My mother and one of Farmer Grey's old riding horses were standing nearby and seemed to know what was happening. "They've found a hare," my mother said. "If they come this way, we'll see the hunt."

Soon all of the dogs were tearing down the field of young wheat next to ours. I'd never

heard such a noise. They didn't bark, howl, or whine but loudly called, "Yoh! Yoh, oh!"

Men on horseback came after the dogs. Some of them wore green coats. They all galloped as fast as they could.

The old horse standing with my mother snorted and looked eagerly after the horses in the hunt. We young colts wanted to gallop with them. But they soon were in the fields lower down, where they halted. The dogs stopped barking and ran here and there with their noses to the ground.

"They've lost the scent," the old horse said. "Maybe the hare will get away."

"What hare?" I asked.

"I don't know what hare. Any hare they can find will do for the dogs and men to run after."

Before long the dogs cried "Yoh! Yoh, oh!" again. They all came back at full speed, making straight for our meadow, where the high bank and hedge overhung the brook.

"Now we'll see the hare," my mother said.

Wild with fear, a hare rushed by and made for the woods.

The dogs pursued. They burst over the bank, leaped the stream, and came dashing across the field followed by the huntsmen. Six or eight men leaped their horses clean over, close upon the dogs.

The hare tried to get through the fence, but

she couldn't find a big enough opening. She turned around sharply to make for the road. Too late. The dogs were on her with their wild cries. We heard one shriek, and that was the end of her.

One of the huntsmen rode up and whipped off the dogs, who would have torn the dead hare to pieces. He held up the hare's body, torn and bleeding, by one leg. All the men seemed pleased.

I was so astonished that at first I didn't see what was happening by the brook. When I looked, there was a sad sight. Two fine horses were down. One was struggling in the stream. The other was groaning on the grass. One of the riders was getting out of the water covered with mud. The other, a young man, lay motionless.

"That rider's neck is broken," my mother said.

"Serves him right," one of the colts said.

I thought the same.

My mother said, "I don't know why people like this sport. They tear up the fields, often hurt themselves, often cause the death of good horses—all to kill some poor hare, fox, or deer."

While my mother was saying this, we stood and looked on. Many of the riders had gone to the motionless young man. Farmer Grey, who had been watching what was happening, was the first to lift him. The young man's head fell back;

his arms hung down. Everyone looked very serious. There was no noise now. Even the dogs were quiet and seemed to know that something was wrong.

People carried the young man to Farmer Grey's house. I heard afterward that it was young George Gordon, Squire Gordon's only son, a fine, tall young man and the pride of his family.

Men now rode off in all directions—to the physician, to the horse doctor, and no doubt to Squire Gordon, to let him know about his son.

When Mr. Bond, the horse doctor, came to look at the black horse who lay groaning on the grass, he shook his head. One of the horse's legs was broken. Someone ran to Farmer Grey's house and came back with a gun. Presently there was a loud bang and a dreadful shriek. Then all was still. The black horse moved no more.

My mother was very upset. She said that the horse's name was Rob Roy and that he was a fine horse with no vices. After that, she never would go to that part of the field.

A few days later the church bell tolled for a long time. Looking over the gate, we saw a long black coach covered with black cloth and drawn by black horses. Other black coaches followed. The bell kept tolling. Young George Gordon was being brought to the churchyard for burial. I never learned what they did with Rob Roy. All this to terrify and kill one little hare.